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The Game of Exorcism: A Spatial Analysis of Religious Practice

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Religious Studies

by

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June 2018

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ABSTRACT

The Game of Exorcism: A Spatial Analysis of Religious Practice

by

William Samuel Chavez

The academic study of exorcism is theoretically weak and limited because the scholarship is largely disjointed, partitioned into sets of case studies described, analyzed, and theorized according to specific cultures and histories. This thesis is an effort to fill the gaps in the literature, offering a comparative analysis of numerous case studies – organizing the eleven most prominent properties of the phenomena into a concise field manual (Section I), synthesizing the most frequently cited scholars into cohesive cultural and social commentaries (Sections II and III), and advancing the analysis of exorcism into a new theoretical direction with the presentation of five spatial dimensions (Section IV).

Exorcism is a highly *ostensible* phenomenon (physically recognizable). Across cultures one can identify patterns in the ways that people interact with and speak to each other and with their environment (objects, places, etc.). There are patterns in the individual maneuvers and orations of the participants; patterns in the social dynamics between the principals involved; patterns in the religious discourse that narrate the event or ritual; patterns in the overall structure that governs the “gameplay.” Exorcism is a “game” because it involves numerous “playable characters” (exorcists, recipients of exorcism, human spectators), “non-playable characters” (deities, angels, demons, ghosts, etc.), additional “game mechanics”

(props, tools, equipment, intervals of time), and a clear “game objective” to use and occupy *space*. “Players” take culturally regulated turns to compete for space as a piece of currency, a capital to be gained and used against their human and non-human competitors.

The study of space is vital to the study of exorcism (and religion, more broadly). In a constant competition for territory, spaces are always muddled with traffic. Thus, this thesis examines exorcism’s “field of play,” how the principals involved mark and unmark space as their own; how the various social agents ritually interact with space; how spaces are created, warped, and dominated; how movement and activity within space are regulated; how spaces influence religious individuals and vice versa. In the end, whether exorcism manifests as a spontaneous event or as a prescriptive ritual, there is always a *story* being told in space (“game narrative”). This spatial analysis of exorcism then contributes to the study of how human beings religiously interact with space (with whatever is in their environment).

Sections II and III are devoted to examining the key “players” of the “game” (human and non-human alike) and their relationships with each other. Section IV serves as an unofficial “rulebook” for the “game” of exorcism (an extension of the field manual presented in Section I). Overall, this thesis argues that space is the best heuristic available to study exorcism phenomena; it provides scholars with a more comprehensive understanding of exorcism’s “game mechanics.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction	1
A. Question of Definition	1
B. A Field Manual for Exorcism	9
C. Outline of the Sections	14
II. The Gender Dynamics of the Social Field	18
A. The Projective Protest Thesis	20
B. The Cultural Custom Thesis	25
C. The Pigeon-Hole Thesis	27
D. Conclusion	35
III. The Ritual Efficacy of Exorcism	40
A. The Placebo Thesis	47
B. The Psychic Release Thesis	51
C. The Social Field Thesis	57
D. Conclusion	58
IV. The Five Spatial Dimensions of Exorcism	63
A. The Initial Space of the Intruder	66
B. The Temporary Space of the Intruder	67
C. The Space of the Exorcism	79
D. The Spaces of the Exorcist	83
E. The Final Destination	89
F. Conclusion	93

V. Conclusion	99
Bibliography	101

I. Introduction

The academic study of exorcism is theoretically weak and limited because the scholarship is largely disjointed, partitioned into sets of case studies described, analyzed, and theorized according to specific cultures and histories.¹ These partitions are then characterized by sets of major issues (namely, the prevalence of women among the recipients of exorcism and the ritual efficacy of the practice) and minor concerns (the place of violence in exorcism, exorcism's similarities with legal practices, exorcism's clash with modernity, etc.).² Most of these will be discussed further during the literature review of this thesis.

But let the reader understand, where there is shared theoretical literature specific to the study of exorcism it is scarce. The works by Gananath Obeyesekere (1970, 1981), I.M. Lewis (1971/2003), Vincent Crapanzano (1973 along with Vivian Garrison, 1977), Bruce Kapferer (1983/1991), and Thomas Csordas (1994, 2002) are the most frequently cited among studies on exorcism. It is more often the case, however (and curiously), that contributions to the scholarship as they occur across traditions and locations omit reference to these scholars and rarely share overlapping sources.³

A. Question of Definition

¹ As an example, see Yoram Bilu, "Dybbuk, Aslai, Zar," in *Spirit Possession in Judaism*, ed. Matt Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2003).

² My criterion for "major" versus "minor" is simply based on the frequency of these issues. The "major" ones more commonly appear in the scholarship.

³ Examples include Andre Goddu, "The Failure of Exorcism in the Middle Ages," in *Possession and Exorcism*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Garland, 1992); Daniel P. Walker, *Unclean Spirits* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 1981); Michael W. Cuneo, *American Exorcism* (New York: Doubleday, 2001); Tamar Alexander, "Love and Death in a Contemporary Dybbuk Story," in *Spirit Possession in Judaism*; and Hilaire Kallendorf, "The Rhetoric of Exorcism," *Rhetorica* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2005).

There is a popular misconception that exorcism is a purely Christian enterprise. For most of my readers the 1973 film *The Exorcist* serves as a cultural entry point, albeit a sensationalized one, to the practice of this ritual. After watching the film, one could presume exorcism to be the ritual response to the threat of diabolical possession, a subject contextualized with issues of theodicy, belief in the supernatural, cosmic dualism, the transcendent authority of the Catholic Church, martyrdom, and the like. Ironically, only one of the heavily cited scholars listed above (Csordas) focuses on Christian exorcism (see FN 11, 159-166). And even without the film, the history of the term *exorcism* certainly suggests that the practice is Judeo-Christian in origin.

The term “exorcism” derives from the Greek *exorkizein*, “to bring under oath,” or “to adjure.” In the New Testament, the word is rarely used to characterize the works of Jesus. However, by the third century Christians understood the term as an indirect prayer to Christ to expel harmful spirits from persons or objects.⁴ Justin Martyr (100-165 C.E.), Tertullian (170-220), Origen (c. 185-254), Cyprian (d. 258), Athanasius (c. 296-373), and Epiphanius (c. 315-403) all wrote on the practice of exorcism among the followers of the early church – and not just in the baptismal liturgy.⁵ The pseudepigraphical “Testament of Solomon” (c. first to third century C.E.) features the archangel Michael granting Solomon a magic seal ring. With this, Solomon is able to summon up demons, coerce them to reveal their names, and compel them to help with the construction of the Temple.⁶ Archeological excursions have also revealed the use of Aramaic bowl spells produced in the Near East between the

⁴ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), 121.

⁵ See Jeffrey Grob, “A Major Revision of the Discipline on Exorcism” (PhD diss., Saint Paul University, 2006), 43-49.

⁶ D.C. Duling, “Testament of Solomon,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Volume I*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983), 935.

4th and 5th century. Jewish magicians would use these clay bowls as exorcistic devices – after first inscribing inside the names and artistic representations of the afflicting demons.⁷

But while the term⁸ may have Judeo-Christian roots the practice of exorcism is much older and much more global. To see this we must first revise our definition. Nancy Caciola, a medievalist (2005), has defined *exorcism* as the removal of “invasive spiritual forces from the body in a formal rite of expulsion.”⁹ In this thesis I will argue for the expansion of this definition with respect to two issues: the focus on bodily possession as a precondition and the method of permanent expulsion as the prime directive.

Most scholars treat exorcism as a secondary concern, favoring instead the physical experience of possession at the expense of granting exorcism its own independent value. Exorcism, Caciola argues, “cannot fully be understood without reference to the concept of spirit possession, the state that it redresses.” This claim is not unfounded – just hyperbolic. Janice Boddy, a medical anthropologist (1994), has effectively demonstrated the prevalence of spirit possession among world cultures.¹⁰ The scholarly consensus of the single, decisive characteristic that defines exorcism is then typically a ritual of “dispossession.” This thesis, however, will find possession of the body (altered states of consciousness, aberrant speech

⁷ Shaul Shaked et al., *Aramaic Bowl Spells* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 2, 29-30. See FN 309.

⁸ Protestant exorcism ministries as early as the 1960s began employing other terms to describe their practices, e.g. *deliverance*, *spiritual warfare*, *prayer healings*, and the like.

⁹ Nancy Caciola, “Exorcism,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 2927.

¹⁰ Janice Boddy, “Spirit Possession Revisited,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994).

patterns and movement, etc.) to be a *sufficient* precondition for exorcism but not a *necessary* one.¹¹

For instance, several rituals have retrospectively been categorized as *exorcism* within the Chinese medical texts from the Han Dynasty (see *Wushi'er Bingfang*, “Recipes for Fifty-two Ailments”), the dream divination tablets from Northern Mesopotamia (see *Iškar Zaḳīqu*, “Akkadian Dream Book”), and the magical hymns from Ancient India (see *Atharva Veda*, “Veda of Magical Formulas”) – all of which are comfortably before the Common (Christian) Era. To repeat, the practice of exorcism (albeit not the word) is much older than Jesus, his early followers, and the dawn of Christianity. These older phenomena are labeled as “exorcism” cases¹² due to similarities in ritual mechanics (e.g. performative utterances, apotropaeum or demonifuge,¹³ and the like). Thus, exorcisms could be employed against the makers of bad dreams,¹⁴ against bodily afflictions,¹⁵ and even to keep serpents (*nagas*) off

¹¹ For a discussion of the Charismatic typology of supernatural interference (i.e. *temptation, oppression, obsession, possession, demonic harassment*), see Thomas J. Csordas, *The Sacred Self* (Berkeley: U of California, 1994), 193-194.

¹² Sally A.L. Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 120-121; Donald Harper, “Wu Shih Erh Ping Fang” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1982), 3, 67; Maurice Bloomfield, *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), 11, 29.

¹³ Another research concern that I examine in this thesis is the equipment of exorcism. But there is still a wealth of data unstudied (in a comparative light) in exorcism, viz. the material types of tools, the various functions of tools, the spaces of employment, the methods of deployment, etc. See FN 242.

¹⁴ Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals*, 50-53, 103-109; Bloomfield, *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*, 167.

¹⁵ Harper, “Wu Shih Erh Ping Fang,” 117n82.

the premises.¹⁶ This thesis is not seeking to remove spirit possession from the study of exorcism, but merely advocating that we need not lurk in its shadow.¹⁷

What then counts as exorcism? This question is not often asked by scholars yet it is crucial to understanding how exorcism operates. Unlike the gender dynamics and cultural functions involved (which will be explored in Sections II and III, respectively), the question of definition is not a major concern within the scholarship; there is no clear series of arguments and rebuttals between scholars on this issue. However, there is at least one exception, the details of which open our discussion: the phenomenon of “tarantism” (a form of ecstatic behavior).

Vincent Crapanzano (2005) has argued with Gilbert Rouget (1985) over the subject of “tarantism” and whether the placation of the possessing agent qualifies as exorcism. I refer to this disagreement as the “adorcism” debate,¹⁸ borrowing the term from Luc de Heusch who differentiated the rite of domesticating spirits (adorcism) from the permanent expulsion of demons (exorcism).¹⁹ In this semantic debate, Crapanzano represents the predominant position believing that exorcisms typically do not conclude with a newly formed alliance between possessor and possessed.²⁰ Rouget complicates the issue by questioning the ultimate objective of the ritual.

¹⁶ Bloomfield, *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*, 151-152.

¹⁷ Soon we will discuss how supernatural predators and pests can occupy and use many other spaces besides the human body, e.g. houses (FN 290), toilets (FN 199), dolls (FN 222), trees (FN 218), and so on.

¹⁸ While few have adopted the term, de Heusch’s classification scheme has still been observed by other scholars in the field. For examples, see Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii, 2001), 96; and Jackie Assayag, *At the Confluence of Two Rivers* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 117.

¹⁹ I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (London: Routledge, 2003), xiii.

²⁰ Cf. Isabelle Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), 101. “The culturally preferable way to deal with overzealous ‘good’ spirits is to plead for a more

In a pivotal study, Ernesto de Martino's analysis of tarantism (1961) was also a much more general report of religion and magic in the Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy). Although tarantism has been labeled as "hysteric behavior," "dancing mania," and the like, *tarantella* (its local name) refers to the "choreutic-musical exorcism" that cures the poisonous bite of a mythic tarantula.²¹ Those suffering from the affliction (sing. *tarantata*, plur. *tarantati*), the majority of whom were women, often became so morbidly excited that they could not sleep – singing, laughing, and dancing continually. Some would avoid people and seek seclusion, while others displayed hypersexual behaviors. Additionally, according to de Martino, some *tarantati* could be found hanging on ropes suspended from trees and ceilings and adopting other spider-like behaviors.²²

In the fifteenth century those suffering from the "disease" would then show extreme sensitivity to the music of fifes, clarinets, and drums. The brisk rhythm of the *tarantella* ritual was believed to cause the poison from the tarantula's bite to be dispersed throughout the dancing body of the victim, from whence it was expelled harmlessly through the skin as perspiration. In the seventeenth century, it was customary for bands of musicians to traverse the country in the summer months (when the spiders were known to strike),²³ treating the *tarantati* in different villages and towns at large festivals and carnivals. De Martino's

viable line of communication. Again one hires the ritual musicians (*pampaikkarar*), this time to extract (or at least try to) some 'promise' (*cattiya vakku*) that the spirits will only 'dance' at specific times and places. Any ritual treatment for such possessions then is quite opposite to that of an exorcism: these visitors should be placated rather than expelled."

²¹ Ernesto de Martino. *The Land of Remorse*, trans. Dorothy Louise Zinn (London: Free Association, 2005), 36, 87. Additionally, "rimorso" may mean both *remorse* and *to be bitten* again, according to Vincent Crapanzano, foreword to *The Land of Remorse*, vii.

²² Crapanzano, foreword to *The Land of Remorse*, x; Jean Fogo Russell, "Tarantism," *Medical History*, XXIII (1979), 410; De Martino, *The Land of Remorse*, 89.

²³ Russell, "Tarantism," 415. "Many investigations have been carried out over the centuries, but none has been able to prove why only those bitten by spiders or scorpions from this area [the cleared forests of Apulia] and in the summer got tarantism."

fieldwork was then conducted in 1959 in Galatina, where he observes congruent tarantella behavior and notes the particular curative powers attributed to St. Peter and St. Paul against spiders, snakes, and scorpions.²⁴

Skeptical of de Martino's reading of the tarantella dance as exorcistic in its function, Vincent Crapanzano questioned the analysis.

Are they poisoned by the spider's bite? Are they possessed by the spider? Are they enraptured by the saint? Are they struck by the devil? Is the illness, the affliction itself, exorcised? Is the aim of the tarantella the permanent expulsion of whatever the source of affliction is thought to be? Or is the goal the creation of an accommodating bond - a symbiotic relationship - between the tarantata and the tarantula or any other source of affliction? De Martino is never clear.²⁵

So what exactly is the entity being exorcised by the ritual? This question is at the heart of the "adorcism" debate I wish to engage and the topic of tarantism allows us to evaluate this nuance. As Crapanzano argues:

[W]here the possessing spirit is considered to be evil, as in Christianity, exorcism aims at permanent expulsion, but where the spirit is understood in amoral terms, as in North Africa, exorcisms attempt to transform the afflicting spirit into a protective one. Insofar as the tarantati are seasonally rebitten and have to dance the tarantella anew, it would seem that tarantism hovers between the two attitudes.²⁶

For Crapanzano, the dichotomy of formal expulsion and placation seems to be a useful heuristic.²⁷ Gilbert Rouget, however, shifts the academic focus to the expelled afflictions, thereby allowing adorcism rituals to count as forms of exorcism.

[I]n tarantism as elsewhere, it is not a conflictual relation with the deity that is involved, but the partaking of an alliance. The fact that, depending on the case, this relation can vary from alliance proper to a simple pact of peaceful coexistence...is secondary. [...]

²⁴ Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 37; Russell, "Tarantism," 408.

²⁵ Crapanzano, foreword to *The Land of Remorse*, xi-xii.

²⁶ Crapanzano, foreword to *The Land of Remorse*, xii.

²⁷ For more on his use of the placation discernment, see Vincent Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha* (Berkeley: U of California, 1973), 155; and Vincent Crapanzano, introduction to *Case Studies in Spirit Possession*, eds. Vincent Crapanzano and Vivian Garrison (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1977), 15.

Despite appearances, the divinity responsible for the possession is not the one that is exorcised. On the contrary, it is the divinity concerned who, by allowing the possessed person to identify himself with him or her, provides the means of exorcising the illness – real or imagined – from which the person is suffering.²⁸

Crapanzano and others stress the oppositional relationship between the possessor and possessed when studying this ritual. Exorcism then often falls within a category that I call *kosmic combat*.²⁹ By this, I refer to a strict sense of religious dualism whenever dealing with the “forces of evil.” There are typically no negotiations, accommodations, compromises, or collaborations with the enemy. There is only combat. Thus, the adorcism debate reveals that the more a ritual embraces these issues of alterity the more likely it will be embraced by scholars as an instance of exorcism.

There is a trend for scholars to approach “exorcism” as a pejorative term reserved for the permanent expulsion of peripheral agencies.³⁰ It is not hard to see that this dualistic aspect also has traditional Judeo-Christian influences.³¹ However, for many world religions, appeasement, adoration, and even trickery are all viable options in the course of exorcism

²⁸ Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1985), 164. Cf. Crapanzano, foreword to *The Land of Remorse*, xi-xii. “To insist, however, as...Rouget does, that the tarantata is possessed by the spider and that the tarantella is simply an exorcism of the possessing spider is, in my view, to expect an unrealistic level of systemic classification.”

²⁹ William Chavez, “KOSMIC KOMBAT!” (Honors Thesis, U of Rochester, 2013).

³⁰ For an explanation, see Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 152-153. “[I]n order to expel them, one must first enter into communication with them and appease them; in short, one must have established bonds with them, if not through possession, at least by making a pact. What we need to remember from all this is that in a great many cults, in black Africa at least, possession séances are devoid of any element of exorcism. Whenever there is genuine exorcism the expulsion of the genius, however dramatic it may be, is merely the culmination of a process in which integration of the deity is a prerequisite and a sine qua non. Finally, the term exorcism is frequently used pejoratively, mainly because contact with another religion has led certain people to refer to spirits as demons when, in fact, for the adepts there is nothing demoniacal about them.”

³¹ I am not advocating for scholars to stop using the term. But acknowledging its historical baggage is important.

rituals. In Tibetan Buddhism, for instance, the main task of the exorcist is to convince (or dupe) the possessing demons that a dough effigy (made with the hair, clothing, and other material possessions of the demoniac) is a more desirable target. In the early stages of the ritual, the demons are respectably treated as houseguests, showered with food, garlands, and other gifts. Once they have taken the bait, the demons, trapped within the dough effigy, are either ritually disposed (outside the perimeter of the community) or destroyed.³² In regards to defining exorcism as a curative for bodily possession through means of formal expulsion, this thesis seeks to broaden the conversation (starting with the data pool). Similarly, I have also worked to reduce the number of Christian and, more particularly, Catholic examples within this thesis to work against the popular misconception mentioned above.

B. A Field Manual for Exorcism

Freed from any previous shorthand definitions, this thesis will engage a wide range of ritual devices and techniques, all organized within a “polythetic” classification model for the category of “exorcism.” In my proposed system, no single, definitive feature is *sufficient* for a datum to be studied as exorcism. Adopting instead a system of family resemblances, any practice or event³³ studied as exorcism must possess some determinative number of the properties that will be outlined shortly. Each property in this inventory is then exhibited by a large number of individual cases (which should be evident after examining various ethnographic and historical examples). The system’s goal is for no single property to be

³² Donald S. Lopez, Jr., “Exorcising Demons with a Buddhist Sutra,” in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 512-514.

³³ Auto-exorcisms (accomplished either through apotropaic places or objects) do not even require rituals or ritualists; they are merely exorcism *events*. For example, see Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 110. “Leila began to ‘dance’ [the goddess] Mariamma...at the very place (the Mel Malaiyanur temple) and time (a new moon day) that the untimely dead are ‘made to run away,’ suggesting that she was managing some form of auto-exorcism.” See also FN 215.

possessed by every individual case of exorcism, nor for any single case to possess every property. This latter feature is important so that the morphology suggested here is not hierarchical, that the individual cases of exorcism are not admitted into the class based on how much they resemble a “pure” exemplum. This taxonomy must be held to reasonably high standards so that it can organize and encompass the currently disconnected exorcism literature.

I submit that there are at least eleven properties that must be studied before any scholarly analysis on the subject of exorcism. First, exorcism features maneuvers that render some culturally-postulated superhuman agent powerless. The most frequent emic narratives involve the possessor’s destruction, torture, displacement, and/or capture. The most frequent methods of debilitation involve violent combat³⁴ but also placation and deception.

Second, as we saw in the adorism debate, the subject of exorcism is saturated with issues of alterity. Inter- and intra-group tensions color the way exorcism is performed through the use of collective representations (e.g., ideologies, discourses, and symbols). This property has received the most scholarly focus. Therefore, the early sections of this thesis will engage exorcism as a vehicle for the confrontation between traditional socio-religious binaries: male/female, human/superhuman, central/peripheral,³⁵ and health/sickness. In sum,

³⁴ Threatening demons with violent injury was a regular formula in Han maledictions. Syntactically, each curse phrase took the form of a verb threatening injury followed by a direct object which either named the demon or the part of its anatomy under attack. The following comes from Donald Harper, “Wang Yen-shou’s Nightmare Poem,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47, no. 1 (June 1987), 263. “Scorch your carcass / Pull apart your trunk and joints. / Cut away your flesh. / Rip out your lungs and guts / If you do not quickly depart, those who remain will be fodder.”

³⁵ I.M. Lewis presents this dichotomy in order to designate the spirits that directly uphold public morality (central) from those more hostile agencies that threaten public order (peripheral). For an explanation, see Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, xiv, 27. “Because they play no direct part in upholding the moral code of the societies in which they receive so much

the traditional, and hence dominant, etic theories view exorcism as the restoration of various cultural norms, as response to the articulation of social anxieties and forbidden urges of the lower-ranking members of a religious community. As a result, the academic understanding of exorcism has typically been reduced to a reinforcement of social status, a public shaming of heterogeneity, the ritualized removal of difference, and/or a system of imposed normalcy. But such social framings (or heuristics), though significant and helpful, often fail to capture just how *ostensible* exorcism can be. The ritual mechanics of the phenomenon are highly structured and, therefore, easy to recognize in the field.

Third, exorcism rituals are a performative enterprise.³⁶ It is implied that ritual agency (or “power”) spawns from performative utterances, gestures, writing, sounds, and so forth.³⁷ Fourth, related to the performative aspects above, as a major ritual mechanic of exorcism, this “power” is exerted over the physical body. The recipient of exorcism is directly exposed to some powerful agent. Such techniques involve the internal employment of various substances (via consumption), the external employment of material tools and equipment (detached from the body of the exorcist), as well as physical contact between the exorcist and the recipient of the exorcism.³⁸

Fifth, because of these performative activities, exorcism also features a connection to many other rituals, the most frequent involving a blessing or cleansing (of the exorcist, tools,

attention, I call these spirits ‘peripheral’. They are in fact very often also peripheral in a further sense. For typically these spirits are believed to originate outside the societies whose women they plague.”

³⁶ By “performative,” I do not refer to Nabokov’s use of the word (see FN 95-96). Here, I speak within the tradition of J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) and Stanley Tambiah, “A Performative Approach to Ritual,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1981).

³⁷ FN 282.

³⁸ FN 242-244.

location, etc.), the diagnosis of the recipient, the channeling of some exorcising power, and the disposal of containers, to name a few. Exorcism rituals are closely associated with preventative measures (i.e. religious boundary making) that are renewed regularly.³⁹ It should also be noted that most exorcisms exist within a sequence with other exorcisms (either on the same recipient or others nearby).

Sixth, exorcism rituals center on episodic “gameplay.” The performative maneuvers and utterances are well-situated within a ritual arrangement. Exorcism often consists of a patterned turn-taking sequence in which the behavioral repertoire of the main participants is highly structured into “rounds.”⁴⁰ The contribution of each participant – their “turns” – could then be either verbal, through the use of body language, or telekinetic.⁴¹ Additionally, “rounds” composed of nonsymmetrical turn structures (where one participant dominates the exorcism) are also prevalent.

Seventh, related to the performative, “playful” nature of the phenomenon, exorcism features actions that gradually intensify, that move towards a climax.⁴² One could measure this physically according to speed, volume, tone, force, and the like. Narratively (at the emic level), the various techniques could also be understood to entice, scare, and/or battle the possessor.⁴³ Eighth, during this episodic “gameplay,” exorcisms usually involve the formation of a “quadrilogue” (a fluid conversation between the practitioner, recipient,

³⁹ FN 206.

⁴⁰ FN 102, 84, 85.

⁴¹ Sixteenth century Jewish mystics often commanded the invading spirit to give a sign that he actually left the body. This could be signaled through blowing out a candle or saying “Peace be upon you.” See Raphael Patai, “Exorcism and Xenoglossia among the Safed Kabbalists,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 91, no. 361 (Jul. - Sep., 1978), 826.

⁴² FN 311.

⁴³ FN 105, 312.

possessor, and audience).⁴⁴ One should then observe the verbal exchange between these participants. This exchange can manifest in question-asking (negotiations, interrogations),⁴⁵ imperative statements (commands, diatribes), rhetorical apostrophes and code-switching, but also long one-sided conversations (monologues, asides).⁴⁶

Ninth, at the narrative level, exorcisms feature a change in the recipient's "selfhood," resulting in a "self" either newly established or recently restored. This property speaks to the specific emic improvement of the individual's personality, societal role, adherence to cultural norms, and so on, but also an individual's physical, mental, and psychological health. As the tenth property, there is also an inherent incongruity regarding the recipient of the exorcism. By "incongruity," I refer to the common conflation of categories (possessor/possessed) but also the use of a ritual proxy or substitute common among the rituals.⁴⁷

Thus, before engaging the last of the eleven properties (the central focus of Section IV), I wish to reiterate that any practice or event studied as exorcism must possess some determinative number of the properties just outlined. Exorcism is a highly *ostensible* phenomenon. Across cultures, one can identify patterns in the ways that people interact/speak to each other and with their environment (objects, places, etc.). There are

⁴⁴ FN 177.

⁴⁵ FN 263.

⁴⁶ Kallendorf, "The Rhetoric of Exorcism."

⁴⁷ In her Taiwan case study, Lin Wei-Ping reports that the houses of the villagers are constructed in the image of the human body. For a diagram, see Lin Wei-Ping, "Boiling Oil to Purify Houses," in *Exorcism in Daoism*, ed. Florian C. Reiter (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 163, Fig. 8. For the significance of this structure, see "Boiling Oil to Purify Houses," 164. "Thus, we can say that in this oil-boiling ritual, what the local people try to purify is not abstract and objectified houses, but personalized places, which can hardly be differentiated from their own physical bodies." Cf. Bruce Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons* (Providence: Berg, 1991), 154.

patterns in the individual maneuvers and orations of the participants; patterns in the social dynamics between the principals involved; patterns in the religious discourse that narrate the event or ritual; patterns in the overall structure that governs the “gameplay.”

C. Outline of the Sections

All of these properties will be further demonstrated in the sections that follow. However, this thesis proposes that *space* (the last property of this system) is the best heuristic available to analyze the phenomenon of exorcism. The features outlined above collectively demonstrate the “ostension” of exorcism. By this, I mean an ostensive definition (or field manual) whereby one could point to an event or ritual and confidently recognize it as “exorcism.” The following analysis then proposes that exorcism functions *visibly in space*. A spatial lens will highlight the ritual mechanics and the physical characteristics of the “gameplay” that are seldom mentioned in the more social heuristics. That said, a spatial analysis will also provide a consideration for the power dynamics noted by other scholars to be made manifest within the “field of play.”

It is with this in mind that I argue that exorcism rituals seek to resolve *spatial* tensions between humans and intrusive supernatural agents (the eleventh property). At its core, exorcism implies that some “agent” wishes to regulate the *proper* activity within a particular space (e.g. to expel an intruder).⁴⁸ I argue that exorcism refers to either the proper maintenance of rigidly fixed positions in space or to their establishment. To show this, I offer a comparative analysis of cross-cultural cases of exorcism – organizing key examples into five spatial dimensions (Section IV).

⁴⁸ “Proper” here refers to whatever suits the agenda of the dominant controller of the space.

Conceptions of space are always dynamic and fluid. For this thesis, I propose that *space* designate any topological area or object that can be occupied and/or used. In the study of mathematics, topology allows the scholar the ability to equate abstract objects with their deformations (twists, bends, warps, etc.). Tearing, however, is typically not allowed as it would permanently alter the space.⁴⁹ For instance, one could bend a single sheet of paper so that the lengthwise edges connect, creating a tube or cylinder. If we imagine that the paper was elastic enough, the two open ends of the tube could also be connected, creating a donut. These transitions would all be possible because the single sheet, the tube, and the donut all share the same topology.⁵⁰

Thus, not only can space be dominated by agents of power, but it can also be temporarily manipulated by its users.⁵¹ Together, these two principles will then shape how I discuss space in reference to exorcism. In a constant competition for territory, spaces are always muddled with traffic. Thus, I examine how the principals involved in exorcism mark and unmark space as their own; how the various social agents ritually interact with space; how spaces are created, warped, and dominated; how movement and activity within space are regulated; how spaces influence religious individuals and vice versa.

⁴⁹ We may still see exceptions to this. See FN 210, 216, and 218 about discontinuous pockets.

⁵⁰ Consider the Möbius strip: take a paper strip (or ribbon), give one end a half-twist (180°), and then join the two ends of the strip together to form a loop. If an ant were to crawl along the length of this non-orientable surface in a single direction, it would return to its starting point after having traversed the original length of the strip twice (using both sides of the original paper but without ever crossing an edge). This new space is still topologically equivalent to the original paper strip.

⁵¹ I speak of what it means to “use” space rather abstractly. It has to be because an agent’s influence on a given space (especially the supernatural kind) is not always detected by the traditional senses. This understanding of *usage* can then include the rearranging of objects within a space, the warping of the space’s structure, the marking and unmarking of space (according to group associations and symbols), etc. See FN 229.

The next two sections of the thesis serve as a general review of the literature within this subfield. Section II is in conversation with ethnographers and historians, while Section III reflects the more recent scholarship of sociologists and medical anthropologists. Section II examines the gender dynamics present within most cases of exorcism. While there are many other social dynamics at play within this ritual (e.g. the parents' power over children, the elders' power over youth, the missionaries' power over the indigenous, etc.), most scholars have focused their analysis on the predominance of women among the recipients of exorcism. Three hypotheses are then presented to explain why women would either self-elect to undergo such a liminal experience or why others would force it upon them. All three explanations are valid and appropriate for their particular regions and cultural contexts. But this thesis is mostly concerned with how these social dynamics unfold in space. For exorcism, there is always a story being told spatially. How then do these social dynamics between "players" influence the "gameplay" and the "field of play"?

Section II examines how the traditional socio-religious binaries of exorcism (sacred/profane, human/superhuman, central/peripheral) intersect with the male/female dynamic. Section III is then entirely dedicated to the examination of those same alterities intersected with the healthy/sick binary. This section reviews the scholars attempting to explain the mechanisms by which exorcism "works," the physical, mental, and social predicaments that the ritual redresses. Three such hypotheses will be presented, the third of which serves as an analytic bridge between Sections II and III. The goal of Section III, however, is to traverse the web of dynamic relationships not just among people but with objects, places, and other non-human entities. The medical anthropologists acknowledge that all sorts of non-human entities can be imbued with social power and agency over time. This

is, for instance, how placebos become effective. The space of exorcism is never a vacuum. The agency allotted to our *neighbors* – other people, places, objects, supernatural predators and pests, all of which contribute to exorcism’s “gameplay” and “field of play” – is crucial to a deeper understanding of Section IV.

As an extension of the field manual above, Section IV then serves as an unofficial “rulebook” for the “game” of exorcism. Exorcism’s “gameplay” and “field of play” are full of competing and supporting “roles” available to human participants (e.g. exorcists, recipients of exorcism, human spectators) as well as many “non-playable characters” that are explicitly not human (deities, angels, demons, ghosts, etc.). A spatial analysis then provides a better understanding of exorcism’s “game mechanics.” *Space* matters to the study of exorcism (and religion, more broadly) not just because various places serve as appropriate locations for cultural transmission or serve “players” as empty positions simply to occupy during “gameplay.” While this is certainly the case, much more importantly, in exorcism, space should also be studied as a coveted resource. “Players” take culturally regulated turns to compete for space as a piece of currency, a capital to be gained and used against their human and non-human competitors.

The key to possession is not to be found within the individual but in the ideology with which people think about the world. The process of becoming possessed depends upon the subject being defined as possessed. But only certain people in certain social categories are liable to be defined as possessed.⁵²

II. The Gender Dynamics of the Social Field

More than any other issue, anthropologists who engage the subject of exorcism have attempted to explain the predominance of women among the possessed.⁵³ I submit that there are three prominent commentaries on this phenomenon, each of which crafts its own social narrative that explains why certain women would either self-elect to undergo such a traumatic experience or why others would coerce them into these situations. The first hypothesis – which can be constructed primarily through the work of Gananath Obeyesekere (1970, 1977, 1981), Vincent Crapanzano (1973, along with Garrison, 1977), Yoram Bilu (1980, 1985), and I.M. Lewis (1971/2003) – states that troubled women consciously seek out the possession idiom in order to gain a temporary degree of social leverage; as a means of expressing their individual frustrations. I refer to this social narrative as the *projective protest thesis*, whereby especially marginalized women utilize the idiom of possession as a

⁵² R.L. Stirrat, “Demonic Possession in Roman Catholic Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1977), 153.

⁵³ Gender issues were essential to possession. In the early modern Christian society, most of the patients were women, children, and bachelors, or recently married people. Their inferior status in the public domain and family life fueled the possession crisis. For more, see Roni Weinstein, “Kabbalah and Jewish Exorcism in Seventeenth-Century Italian Jewish Communities,” in *Spirit Possession in Judaism*, ed. Matt Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2003), 249. “In the Jewish context as well, possession put at women’s disposal a legitimate mechanism for the expression of personal distress, typically represented by a strange voice and an alien identity.”

means of social protest against their male oppressors. Spirit possession is popular among women because it serves as a vehicle for psychological projection.

Along with Nancy Caciola (2003), though independent of one another, Bruce Kapferer (1983/1991) proposes a second hypothesis wherein women collectively undergo more exorcisms than men not because of their lowly social status (and coping inabilities) but because of their cultural typifications. “Typification” refers to the process of creating a standard cultural custom (e.g. women frequently exorcised) based on standard cultural assumptions (e.g. the female relationship with the demonic). Under this social narrative, the *cultural custom thesis*, the ritual restoration of the cultural order has greater impact when women are the recipients. Furthermore, women hold the same cultural assumptions as men regarding demonology and therefore do not need to be coerced into participation nor do they seek to appropriate the possession idiom as a form of social expression.

The third hypothesis then presents a much more oppressive system without much room for self-reflection on the part of the recipient. As Michel de Certeau (1970/1996, 1975/1988), R.L. Stirrat (1977, 1992), and Isabelle Nabokov (2000) argue, the possession idiom belongs first and foremost to those with the cultural power to enforce it. The human subject is then persuaded or bullied into framing their personal predicaments within the cosmological framework of demonic possession. The possession idiom was not freely chosen by the individual as a form of projective protest nor was it the result of a socially agreed upon set of religious assumptions. Exorcism here is a system that converts deviant behavior into a highly symbolic discourse. For this reason, I refer to this last social narrative as the *pigeon-hole thesis*, the only one of three that acknowledges the reality of social coercion.

This section is dedicated to exploring the particulars of each of these three narratives (projective protest thesis, cultural custom thesis, and pigeon-hole thesis). Since these positions are organized into groups of my own design, the presentation of the case studies behind these cultural commentaries will necessarily rely heavily on quoted material. The guiding issue for this section, in relation to the rest of the thesis, is then how social dynamics (like the male/female binary) are manifested in the ritual, how these group dynamics are performed in space.

Social commentaries alone are weak to highlight the ritual mechanics and the physical characteristics of religious practice. Spatially, there is always a *story* being told – which is often authoritative and hegemonic in character. As William Sax writes:

That is why the order of a procession, or the arrangement of speakers on stage, is so important. Who leads the procession? Who carries the sacred object? Who speaks first? Who speaks last? All of these things are not merely *representative* of relations between those involved, but rather *constitutive* of them.⁵⁴

A. The Projective Protest Thesis

To begin, possession and exorcism, for anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere, are culturally structured insofar as the setting in which they occur and the behavior of the patient have a standard form, a coherent meaning which render them intelligible to the community at large.

[Possession] is radically different qualitatively from psychotic expression or fantasy that is both ego-alien and culture-alien, that is, out of touch with cultural reality. Possession involves an ego-alien experience, but is not culturally alien. A successful exorcism and cure result in harmonizing the original traumatic experience with both ego and culture; thus ecstatic religion is both personal and cultural.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ William S. Sax, *God of Justice* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 53.

⁵⁵ Gananath Obeyesekere, “Psychocultural Exegesis of a Case of Spirit Possession in Sri Lanka,” in *Case Studies in Spirit Possession*, 235-236.

In this approach to exorcism (a methodology Obeyesekere calls “psychological exegesis”), demon possession provides a “ready made cognitive structure” (or idiom)⁵⁶ that can serve as a replacement or substitute for private, psychotic fantasy. As a result, the “cultural fantasy” minimizes the psychotic loss of contact with the outside world,⁵⁷ facilitating communication between patient, ritual specialist, the family, and the larger community.⁵⁸ Often those either related to or associated with the patient then mobilize their communal resources in coping with the possession event, which they have categorized as an illness. This type of mechanism is seen particularly in strongly patriarchal, traditional cultures where exorcism is the preferred treatment applied by husbands to treat their possessed wives or daughters. Responding to such ecstatic behavior with rebellious undertones, the men employ these healing rituals to re-impose patriarchal order and obedience, to reintegrate the women back into the social structure so they can perform their

⁵⁶ See Crapanzano, introduction to *Case Studies in Spirit Possession*, 11. “The possessing spirits are principal elements within the idiom of spirit possession. They are...givens within the world of the believer and subject to an often complex logic or grammar. Whatever their ontological status, their existence is no more questioned than is the existence of their human (and occasionally animal) carriers. Actually, the human and animal carriers are, within the idiom, equally principal elements – a point frequently ignored by Western scholars who despite even a sensitivity to the most basic ontological assumptions of their taken-for-granted world. To render a complete picture of the spirit possession idiom, it would be necessary to include not only a description of the spirits, their associations, and interrelationships, but also a description from within the idiom of their carriers, and *their* associations and relationships. In other words, it would be necessary to render explicit the demonology and anthropology of the system.”

⁵⁷ See Gananath Obeyesekere, “The Idiom of Demonic Possession,” *Social Science and Medicine* 4 (1970), 107. “I am not, of course, suggesting that the patient’s percepts and cognitions are identical with others in the culture. This is obviously not the case, for the intensity of the patient’s experience and the strength of his projections are different from those of his group. Yet the experience is neither alien nor a difficult one for others to comprehend. Sociologically speaking, the individual is not alienated from his culture.”

⁵⁸ See Obeyesekere, “The Idiom of Demonic Possession,” 104-105.

normal roles.⁵⁹ As Yoram Bilu summarizes: “[T]he presumably underlying conflict is acted out, then suppressed, but never solved.”⁶⁰

Of course, one can find an exception to this view in Dorothy L. Hodgson’s work in Tanzania (2005), where women use spirit possession (*orpeko*) and exorcism to implement social change.⁶¹

Unwilling to directly challenge men, women resorted (whether intentionally or not) to an indirect means of overcoming their objections – *orpeko*. [...] Briefly, when sick with *orpeko*, a woman could demand anything and everything from her husband and family, including permission to attend baptismal instruction and church.⁶²

Hodgson then argues that, in line with this first hypothesis, the symptoms of *orpeko* expressed, in embodied terms, women’s consternation over their economic disenfranchisement, political marginalization, and increased workloads and isolation. “But *orpeko* also provided a means,” she adds, “to address and ‘heal’ their situation by reinforcing relationships among women who worked to heal one another and by facilitating their participation in the Christian churches.”⁶³

⁵⁹ Obeyesekere, “The Idiom of Demonic Possession,” 107; Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, xv-xvi.

⁶⁰ Yoram Bilu, “The Moroccan Demon in Israel,” *Ethos* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 1980), 35.

⁶¹ Dorothy L. Hodgson, *The Church of Women* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2005), 203-204. “Although many women in Mti Mmoja initially came to the church because they were sick with *orpeko*, once they were healed ‘they realized that they had found salvation.’ In contrast to the ‘dark way’ of their homes, they found freedom in the church. He [a veteran priest] believed that participation in the church helped them with many domestic problems, such as ‘marital affairs, drunkenness, and being beaten by their husbands.’ ‘The church shows them that this is a bad way.’ He claimed that ‘the church’ would call elder men in to talk about domestic problems, even if the men were not baptized. ‘The church is like a court. ... It tells the truth: husband should love their wives and wives should respect their husbands and love their children.’”

⁶² Hodgson, *The Church of Women*, 216.

⁶³ Hodgson, *The Church of Women*, 218. Cf. *The Church of Women*, 256-257. “By providing women with an expanded spiritual platform from which to launch their critiques of men, they enabled women to reaffirm and reinforce their claims to spiritual and moral superiority in opposition to the increasingly material interests of men.”

Concordantly, the possession idiom also serves as a means of validating the status and enhancing the sociopolitical prestige of established individuals.⁶⁴ In his study of Jewish exorcism, Yoram Bilu notes that the moral authority of the rabbi-exorcists, for instance, was indisputably confirmed by the fact that the spirits eventually acknowledged their authority and submitted to it. As Bilu writes:

Ultimately, the validation of the moral ascendancy of religious leaders through the dybbuk idiom contributed to social control: the rabbi, more than any other figure, served to maintain the Jewish identity of his community. Moreover, the exorcistic ritual reinforced traditional status rankings based on age and sex variables. The rabbi-exorcists, males by definition, were typically middle-aged or old. The possessed, mostly females, were usually quite young.⁶⁵ The exorcistic ritual constituted a conservative mechanism that facilitated the perpetuation of the traditional status hierarchy in the community.⁶⁶

I.M. Lewis wrote at length on the prevalence of women as spirit mediums across cultures, seeing the possession cults of women as “thinly disguised protest movements directed against the dominant sex.”

They thus play a significant part in the sex-war in traditional societies and cultures where women lack more obvious and direct means for forwarding their aims. To a

⁶⁴ See Mu-Chou Poo, “Ghost Literature,” *Asia Major*, Third Series, 13, no. 1 (2000), 61. The following story comes from the *Gaosengzhuan* (c. 530 CE): “Lady Liu, the wife of Xiao Sihua, was sick and often saw ghosts coming to haunt her. At the time, they happened to invite Zhiyan [a trained Buddhist monk] to give a lecture on the Dharma. As soon as Zhiyan arrived at the outer hall, Lady Liu saw a flock of ghosts scurry away.” Cf. Liao Hsien-huei, “Encountering Evil,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, no. 37 (2007), 121. “Another method the Song literati appropriated for defense against demonic invasion was the personal integrity they embodied.”

⁶⁵ See Weinstein, “Kabbalah and Jewish Exorcism,” 250. “Whether the exorcism was conducted in the synagogue, at home, or some other place, the woman was surrounded by a masculine circle, inspecting and touching her body. [...] The alien spirit is not completely alien – it carries a name and personal identity, and it has a defined place in the Jewish cultural milieu. Male values are reconfirmed and legitimized, since the patient and spirit eventually accept the exorcist’s authority.” We will return to an important aspect of this dynamic in Section IV, namely that true power is demonstrated by what one can do to a person’s body.

⁶⁶ Yoram Bilu, “The Taming of the Deviants and Beyond,” in *Spirit Possession in Judaism*, 63-64.

considerable extent they protect women from the exactions of men, and offer an effective vehicle for manipulating husbands and male relatives.⁶⁷

Spirit possession, for Lewis, then indicates not just the marginal status of women but their inability to cope with it.⁶⁸ That these women would seize the possession idiom as a platform to express their social frustrations indicates to Lewis the lack of other cultural coping mechanisms available. Additionally, referencing the work of Janice Boddy (1989), Lewis illustrates a few other practical reasons for women to willingly adopt the possession idiom.

By preventing pregnancy and causing premature and still births, as is believed locally, *zar* spirits assume responsibility for disrupting human fertility. Possession, thus, lifts from the women's shoulders a measure of responsibility for reproduction. At the same time, by paying for the woman's treatment, her husband and kin are forced to acknowledge some liability.⁶⁹

To summarize, it should be underscored that under the projective protest hypothesis, exorcism is understood as a "cathartic acting-out of the conflict between the sexes in a traditional society."⁷⁰ By enabling individuals to articulate forbidden inner urges through an externalized, ego-alien agent, the possession idiom significantly decreases the destructive potentials of the individual and the community.⁷¹ The exorcistic ritual, as Bilu suggests, is then "a prime target for a structural analysis," serving as a mediating juncture where

⁶⁷ Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 26.

⁶⁸ Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, xiii.

⁶⁹ Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, xi.

⁷⁰ Bilu, "The Moroccan Demon in Israel," 35.

⁷¹ Bilu, "The Taming of the Deviants and Beyond," 55. Additionally, much can be added here regarding the "scapegoat" theory formulated by René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979); *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989); and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001). For an excellent application of Girard in Song China, see Judith Boltz, "Taoist Rites of Exorcism" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1985).

traditionally contrasting images such as male versus female, human versus supernatural, central versus peripheral, and the sacred versus the profane are confronted and acted out.⁷²

B. The Cultural Custom Thesis

Bruce Kapferer has since challenged the forms of structural analysis presented in the projective protest position. As noted above, the technique of “psychological exegesis” (belonging to Obeyesekere and others) investigates the underlying psychological conflict in the patient as well as the projective mechanisms of the possession experience.⁷³ “These design/logics and their aesthetization in performance,” Kapferer argues, “are more than mere expressive cultural frames or idioms for universal psychological processes and resist an unproblematic reduction to such psychology.”⁷⁴ Obeyesekere’s position, according to Kapferer, is difficult to either refute or substantiate.⁷⁵

I have no reason to doubt that in relation to specific instances such factors as feelings of oppression in a male-dominated world, a desire to overcome or to draw attention to this oppression, problems of status, ambiguity, and inner psychological disturbance, among a host of others, might motivate women to exorcist practice. However, what I stress is that the explanation of why women *as a category* are more frequently drawn into the exorcist framework, rather than men *as a category*, cannot rest simply on the analysis of specific cases independently of the shared constructs and typifications which men and women have of themselves and of each other. It is possible that both men and women are the subjects in many cases of similar motives to action.⁷⁶

⁷² Bilu, “The Moroccan Demon in Israel,” 33. These issues of alterity will appear several times throughout this thesis – even in the polythetic model found in Section I.

⁷³ Obeyesekere, “The Idiom of Demonic Possession,” 100-101.

⁷⁴ Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, xiii-xiv.

⁷⁵ For more, see Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 130.

⁷⁶ Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 136. “I hypothesize that it is the property of the constructs in terms of which members of social categories interpret their actions to themselves and to others which accounts for the frequency with which women, compared with men, receive alleviation and cure within the domain of explanation and expression controlled by exorcists. Regularity, and the frequency of response which is its index, is a consequence of the process whereby the attitudes of individuals, whatever their source, are objectified through the medium of relevant constructs into the social world of their action.”

Thus, in Kapferer's study of Sinhalese exorcism, he submits that women are subject to demonic attack as a "function of their cultural typification, which places them in a special and significant relation to the demonic."⁷⁷

Women as a category are regarded by exorcists and Sinhalese men as mentally weak. This, together with other cultural attitudes (for example, that women are more impure than men, that they come into greater contact with impurity, and that they evince a greater attachment to matters of the everyday world), is sometimes given as reason for the propensity of women to suffer demonic illness.⁷⁸

Under the narrative of the cultural custom thesis,⁷⁹ women frequently undergo exorcisms not just because they reflect on their marginalized position within a male dominated society. Moreover, the male ritual specialists do not exorcise them solely to reinforce the patriarchal order. For Kapferer, both Sinhalese women and their exorcists reflect on the fragility of their collective cultural order. Women then express this fragility in their bodies and identities. Women are crucial to this system due to their cultural place in the household (the microcosm of the universe). "[E]xorcisms, by acting on women, are empowered (more, I suggest, than when men are patients) to restore and to transform a cultural order which has women and the house as its vital center."⁸⁰

Nancy Caciola has voiced a similar argument in regards to medieval Christianity. Thus, in regards to the predominance of female demoniacs, Caciola answers that "medieval conceptions of the differences between male and female physiology constructed the female body – and with it, the female character – as fundamentally more changeable, more highly impressionable, and thus as more receptive to outside spiritual influences than the male." Women were considered to have a weaker claim to deictic integrity than men, a less sharply

⁷⁷ Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 128.

⁷⁸ Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 70-71.

⁷⁹ See FN 85.

⁸⁰ Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 154.

bounded self. This debility, in turn, rendered them more prone to spiritual influences and invasions.⁸¹ As Caciola explains:

Women were the weaker sex, the softer sex, the less rational sex. Women's bodies were the glory of man, not the image of God. Women were moist; they were cool; they received impressions readily. The female temperament was sluggish, but paradoxically women also were hysterical, prone to fantasies and frenzies. Women's wombs filled up with corrupting humors that clouded their minds and their vision. Women's bodies also were *open*. This is not my adjective, but a medieval word choice: the descriptive pairings open/sealed and porous/dense frequently were applied to female and male physiology. In a sense, these words are simply a recording of the idea that women are more prone to receive spiritual impressions: the porous, open body is an impressionable body. However, these pairs of words also were overlaid with other dichotomies, such as sin and righteousness, body and soul, and divine and demonic possession. The richness of this particular semantic field thus presents a choice opportunity to explore how gender notions overlapped with other categories of analysis.⁸²

The prevalence of female recipients of exorcism, according to the cultural custom thesis, cannot be explained by the internal desire to acquire temporary prestige. Instead, women as a category are more frequently drawn into exorcistic rituals due to their cultural typification. Men and women alike are often convinced that the female form is more fragile and the exorcism is of greater cultural significance when the female form is ritually restored. This particular commentary will resurface in the next section when discussing Thomas Csordas' study of Catholic charismatic communities and the efficacy of deliverance ministries.

C. The Pigeon-Hole Thesis

The third, and final, hypothesis regarding the predominance of women among the possessed presents a much more oppressive system without much room for self-reflection on the part of the ritual recipient. We begin with Michel de Certeau (1970/1996; 1975/1988) whose study of the possession of Ursuline nuns at Loudun (1632-1640) reveals a strict rhetorical system imposed on the possessed women. De Certeau's original question was

⁸¹ Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003), 130.

⁸² Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 151.

then: “Does there exist a ‘discourse of the other’ in cases of possession?”⁸³ He gives his answer in two parts:

On the one hand, for the possessed women the place from which they speak is indeterminate, always giving itself as a “somewhere else” that speaks in them. Something other is speaking which cannot be determined. On the other hand, the exorcists or the doctors respond through a labor of naming or designating that is the characteristic answer to possession in any traditional society. Whether in Africa or South America, therapy in cases of possession essentially consists of naming, of ascribing a term to what manifests itself as speech, but as an uncertain speech inseparable from fits, gestures, and cries. A disturbance arises, and therapy, or social treatment, consists of providing a name – a term already listed in a society’s catalogues – for this uncertain speech. The task of doctors or exorcists is one of nomination, which aims at categorizing the interlocutors, confining them in a place circumscribed by these doctors’ or exorcists’ knowledge.⁸⁴

De Certeau is clear that the women may not even be aware of what their actions and words signify.⁸⁵ Spirit possession for De Certeau is then not a public idiom for women to express their social frustrations, nor does it allow much room for women to personally reflect on the fragility of the cultural order. Gilbert Rouget (1985) has voiced similar concerns regarding this historic possession event.

⁸³ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), 246.

⁸⁴ De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 246-247. Cf. *The Writing of History*, 255-256. “The exorcist or doctor engages in determining who this ‘other’ is by placing him in a topography of proper names and by normalizing once again the connection of the speech act with a social system of statements. Thus exorcism is essentially an enterprise of denomination intended to reclassify a protean uncanniness within an established language. It aims at restoring the postulate of all language, that is, a stable relation between the interlocutor, ‘I,’ and a social signifier, the proper name.”

⁸⁵ De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 257. “Possessed women’s texts do not provide the skeleton key for their language, for it remains indecipherable even to themselves. This is probably the reason why their position as ‘possessed women’ is sustained only by a fluttering from one name to another within the frame imposed upon them.” Isabelle Nabokov suggests the same in Tamilnadu. See Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 97. “Through a relentless, compulsory interrogation, women...are pressured to complete what is culturally known of their given pēy with details from their own biographies. [...] Women can only speak within the code of this inquisition and only in the names and through the voices of demons. They are not even aware of what they say, as they as then, and must be, in entrapping states of consciousness.”

Loudun in fact illustrates a situation in which both identificatory possession and exorcism were involved; but here the exorcism was of a very particular nature, in that the victims were not the ones who asked for it; society (or the Church, which comes to the same thing) imposed it. Contrary to what happens in a society that proposes possession as a remedy for people's ills, at Loudun society entirely rejected possession, and it was the individuals concerned who resorted to it, thereby conforming to an illicit model. Hence exorcism, which was repressive instead of curative, and which did not try to remove a tension between the visible and the invisible, but to resolve a conflict between the individual and society.⁸⁶

Exorcism here is a system that converts deviant behavior into a highly symbolic discourse. As De Certeau clarifies:

The goal of exorcism is to secure a passage from the silence of the possessed to the names that the exorcists provide for her; it transforms the silence of gestures and inarticulate cries into language. [...] It functions at once as *participation in a system* and as *access to the symbolic*. Through her own words, and by virtue of varied procedures, the possessed woman can find an escape from the silence of her body or her desire by entering into the network of symbolization that a culture offers her.⁸⁷

Just as with the projective protest thesis, women, through exorcism, are *removed* into the “confines of her culturally defined role, and the social order between the sexes is maintained.”⁸⁸ However, De Certeau has removed much of her agency from the equation. The work of R.L. Stirrat and Isabelle Nabokov demonstrate the same phenomena in South Asia. In particular, Stirrat’s data among Roman Catholics in Sri Lanka then suggests “how possession and exorcism are used to reinforce relations of domination and subordination.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 46.

⁸⁷ De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 262.

⁸⁸ Bilu, “The Moroccan Demon in Israel,” 35.

⁸⁹ R.L. Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity in a Post-colonial Setting* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1992), 12. Cf. *Power and Religiosity*, 111. “Yet there are clearly limitations in simply viewing the predominance of women amongst the possessed as a result of a particular set of cultural categories which constrain thought and behavior in a strait-jacket of ‘custom.’ Such an approach reifies ‘culture’ in a dangerous way and sets it apart from the people who ‘live’; culture, if it exists, does not exist as a timeless abstract construct but is rather created, recreated, produced and modified in and by the lives of people themselves.” Cf. *Power and Religiosity*, 116. “[W]hilst women, particularly young women, are culturally defined as

As with Obeyesekere, Stirrat seems to accept that demonic possession is a “ready made” system available for the patient’s use. However: “If, as Lewis and Obeyesekere seem to suggest, possession is in some sense a ‘solution,’ it is not so much a solution for the subject but for the subject’s family.”⁹⁰ Demonic possession, Stirrat makes clear, is not just a manifestation of the subordinate role of the patient: “it is also a means through which such subordination is produced.”⁹¹ “During the process of possession and exorcism, the subject is persuaded, forced, or taught, that demonic forces have over-ridden his or her own desires.”⁹²

Recall Bilu’s conceptualization of exorcism as a vehicle for the confrontation between traditional socio-religious binaries: male/female, human/superhuman, central/peripheral, and sacred and profane. Stirrat then broadens our framework further to include not just the healthy and the sick (more of which we will discuss next section) but also the old and the young.

[E]xorcism involves the reassertion of the correct moral order, which is the moral order of those who seek to maintain control over others.⁹³ What is involved in the process of possession and exorcism are disputes over control, usually parents’ control over children. Any sort of behavior which threatens the authority of parents can be represented as demonic possession: the problem is to persuade the children that they are possessed. More generally, possession is something which those who find their authority

being more liable to demonic possession than men, a focus on culture alone ignores the processes through which people become possessed.”

⁹⁰ Stirrat, “Demonic Possession in Roman Catholic Sri Lanka,” 153. Stirrat has more to say regarding the limitations of Obeyesekere’s research. See “Demonic Possession in Roman Catholic Sri Lanka,” 133.

⁹¹ Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity*, 115-116.

⁹² Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity*, 107.

⁹³ Stirrat, “Demonic Possession in Roman Catholic Sri Lanka,” 133. “This desire to view demonic possession within such a framework derives from my dissatisfaction with other current approaches to the subject. In most cases they depend upon certain assumptions about the internal states of mind of those people who become possessed. They do this by inferring the unknown (the state of mind of the possessed) from the known (the incidence of possession; statements about possession) and then using the former to explain the latter. All the really interesting and significant processes are taking place in the mind of the possessed where the anthropologist cannot venture.”

under question can use as a means of reasserting control over uppity underlings: parents over children, men over women, the old over the young. Masked in terms of a moral discourse, with the demons being represented as amoral and evil, possession is centrally concerned with power, particularly power relations within the family.⁹⁴

Under the social narrative of this third hypothesis, the possession idiom is not an act of protest, nor is it the result of some shared set of cultural assumptions. Isabelle Nabokov (2000) then proposes a helpful dichotomy for recognizing the spectrum of oppression within exorcistic rituals. *Prescriptive* rituals work to make people adopt public identities while *performative* rituals⁹⁵ allow them to walk away from their particular social roles and personal relationships.⁹⁶ The exorcisms at Loudun certainly appear to be within the former

⁹⁴ Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity*, 107-108. Cf. "Demonic Possession in Roman Catholic Sri Lanka," 151. "[F]or I.M. Lewis, demonic possession is here the result of the relative powerlessness and low status of women. The only means available for them to express their opposition to this situation is through symbolic rebellion in the form of demonic possession. The fact that most cases are both young and from middle class backgrounds only reinforces this explanation, for it is the middle class which is most puritanical and which exercises most control over its daughters. A similar situation exists in the case of young men who are possessed. Great stress is placed by parents upon educational success on the part of their offspring. Yet objectively, education does not guarantee occupational or economic success, particularly for the youth in rural areas. Possession serves as a means by which sons can rebel against parental domination."

⁹⁵ Gananath Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981), 59. "Village exorcists...are reluctant to concede that a woman, an impure being, could be a receptacle for divine power. They would exorcise the spirit, tie it up magically, and destroy it. But Pemavati, like most urban ecstasies, has a different goal. She wants to convert the dead ancestor into a benevolent being who will act as a communicant to the gods."

⁹⁶ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 12. Cf. *Religion Against the Self*, 101. "But these linkages [via placation rituals] with the goddess produce different 'fruit' from an exorcism. For one thing, they are not programmatic. They do not result from a one-step, one-way operation, as is the case with the ritual that 'makes the demon run away,' but eventually grow out of a long, lonely, and painful passage into possession; 'long' because separation from one's untimely dead cannot be rushed, 'lonely' because these possessed persons are all on their own to deal with their spirits, and 'painful' because counterposing funeral scenarios can be psychologically and socially damaging. For another, the metamorphoses these impromptu linkages with the goddess entail are not 'prescriptive.' Far from enforcing a cultural rationale or a pedagogy, they permit people to make their own creative rationale or a pedagogy, they permit people to make their own creative and meaningful connections with cultural representations."

category, while the latter seems to best fit the tarantella exorcism from Section I where women perform and dance presumably as freely as they wish. Nabokov uses this distinction⁹⁷ to support Stirrat's argument of objectification.⁹⁸ The goal of the Tamil exorcisms (prescriptive rituals), she argues, is to force women to publicly repudiate their reprehensible behavior⁹⁹ and "rededicate themselves to cultural expectations of the 'good wife' (*cumankali*)."¹⁰⁰ Contrary to Kapferer's cultural custom thesis,¹⁰¹ this system (De

⁹⁷ We also see this division when Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, xiii, distances his work from Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair*. "The [highly institutionalized] exorcisms I recorded are...performed by members of a specialist caste who possess knowledge and skills passed down the generations. [...] They are not to be confused with exorcism rites performed at shrines dotted throughout the island (usually for particular kinds of demonic-deity) or, most especially, with a great variety of extremely innovative rites of the type sensitively described by Gananath Obeyesekere springing up especially along the urbanized coast. These rites...are a relatively free form...generally directed at a demon or deity with whom the performer has a deep personal relationship and addresses all manner of anguish and personal misfortune and not a defined class."

⁹⁸ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 76. "Many [women] were prescribed a minimum stay of ten days at the shrine where they would undergo the ritual. They were made to fast, to circumambulate the temple 108 times a day in order to 'purify their bodies and hearts,' and some were whipped with freshly cut margosa leaves to drive off the *pēy*. [...] From the moment a woman was diagnosed with possession, she was also 'caught' in this encompassing world of symbols, stories, and meaning. Out of this discourse her demon was constructed in three dimensions, and the exorcism rite only furthered this convincing objectification."

⁹⁹ See Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 75. "In Tamilnadu, women also acted in ways that struck their kin as odd or inappropriate: they were withdrawn, apathetic, anemic, incoherent, and barren. Like Shanti, they often refused to have sexual intercourse with their husbands, even fleeing from their sight. These behaviors precipitated what Stirrat calls 'suspicions of possession' by close relatives – usually parents but also siblings, spouses, and in-laws. In my experience women sometimes confirmed these *pēy* suspicions by spontaneously entering into trance, 'dancing' like demons, and even speaking from their perspective on occasion."

¹⁰⁰ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 72.

¹⁰¹ Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 10-11. "Exorcism, I posit, reveals the power of the aesthetic formed through practice: the distinctive opening and limiting of experiential possibility in different aesthetic forms, and the varying capacity of aesthetic modes (dependent on the ordering of participants to the realities couched and formed in the aesthetic) to constitute experience and to enable reflection upon experience."

Certeau's "pigeon-hole" thesis¹⁰²) that Nabokov describes does not seem to allow for participant reflection and reflexivity.¹⁰³ "[T]his exorcism," she writes, "run by teams of musicians robs women of any chance to understand and question its inner logic and proceedings."¹⁰⁴ A woman's "cure" consists "of silencing her – an operation...accomplished by transforming her into a lecherous demon who must be beheaded and expelled."¹⁰⁵ For

¹⁰² Throughout the medieval texts reporting the speech uttered by the possessed, De Certeau claims to find the same recurring phrase: "Je est un autre" / "I is another." See De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 255-256. "The madwoman is constantly creating deviance with respect to the postulate $I = x$ (x designating a determinate name). Surely, in the unconsciousness which is a precondition of her being possessed, she enters successively into the loci that a nomenclature of demons provides. Urged by the exorcists to fix her name firmly (it is precisely the avowal of a proper name that they want to extort from her) and to pigeonhole herself within their demonological repertory, she finally declares, 'I am Asmodeus:' $I = Asmodeus$. But soon afterward she will respond, 'I am Aman;' then, 'I am Isacaron,' etc. In this fashion...we have a series of heterogeneous identifications.... The plurality of identifications drawn from the same onomastic table ultimately denies the possibility of any localization, but without rejecting the (demonological) social code, since basically nothing else has been provided for this case. [...] She slips from locus to locus, challenging the stability of all proper names through her trajectory; no determinate value can be linguistically attached to 'I' in any stable way."

¹⁰³ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 71. "At first blush his [Kapferer's] reasoning seems consonant with what I heard from Tamil consultants. Women and men agreed that women are more susceptible to being possessed by demons because of an inherent weakness attributed to their impurity, which also explains why women are likely to be 'caught' while menstruating. It was also said that women are mentally and emotionally deficient, more susceptible to the 'fear' that...can strip the Tamil self of protection against malevolent powers such as *pēys*. But this argument fails to explain why, at least in Tamilnadu, it is not women as a whole but predominantly new brides who are at risk. Of my cases of demonic possession, twenty involved young women who had married within the past six years. ... [S]ixteen [of which] had run away from their husbands. Here, too, the Tamils have their own perspective: the spirits known as *pēys* cause grave psychic disorders and incite women to reject their spouses. But to formulate any analysis based solely on such beliefs can blind us to the social practices and ritual processes that enact this discourse. And when we do link those patterns and actions to the real lives of the women in question we discover a deeper motivational layer."

¹⁰⁴ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 97-98.

¹⁰⁵ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 98. Cf. *Religion Against the Self*, 85. "As Stirrat notes in Sri Lanka, '[O]nce defined as possessed...the subject has little alternative but to go through the rituals of the shrine.' A woman brought to Mel Malaiyanur to be exorcised is, similarly, 'exposed to extreme forms of pressure.' Surrounded by the five musicians who

this reason, Nabokov does not find Obeyesekere's psychological analysis to be truly applicable, either.

Upon reading the projective protest thesis, one would reach an understanding that possession is often a spontaneous or free-form endeavor; that women actively seek out this emotional outlet over others. And yet, for Nabokov, "Tamil women are taught, even pressured, to frame their personal predicaments within the cosmological framework of demonic possession."¹⁰⁶ While Nabokov is careful not to deny her subjects of any agency in this system,¹⁰⁷ she vehemently challenges the notion that women are empowered.

closely monitored all her movements, Shanti, we have seen, was incessantly, aggressively urged to dance and speak. To hasten her entrancement, she was told to stare at a burning camphor flame and lime juice was frequently squirted around her face and body. [...] Then one of the goddess's recruits broke into the exorcism and threatened to beat the *pēy* out of Shanti's body. Although she was restrained, I have watched others in the temple grabbing 'possessed' women by the hair and pulling them to the ground so they could have the demons whipped out of them with braided leather straps. Although these women sobbed and wailed, they made no attempt to avoid the blows or fight back, perhaps because they knew that any show of resistance by their *pēy* would only prolong the beating."

¹⁰⁶ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 71-72. Cf. *Religion Against the Self*, 97. "It is also probable that the exorcism offers women some opportunity to voice feelings of loneliness, abandonment, and martial disappointment. But other than providing a way of venting their alienation and transcending isolation, it is hard to say what is fully or finally liberating for them about Tamil exorcisms. The healers seemed to be operating from a much broader cultural premise. The source of a woman's alienation was locked in her head, in her antisocial and life-threatening fantasies of extramarital sexuality. Their 'therapy,' such as it was, called for these longings to be eradicated, 'cut off,' and the women returned to reason: the safety and structure of the patriarchal family fold and the woman's proper role in it. The exorcism was coercive in ways that transcended its rehabilitating and resocializing functions."

¹⁰⁷ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 98. "Not all Tamil women subjected to this procedure are passive or voiceless victims. Many tried to boycott the proceedings by declining to 'dance.' Two women in my experience managed to resist their desired altered state of consciousness. I will never forget how a third one faked trance and deceived the musician-exorcists by inventing multiple personalities that contradicted cultural understandings of *pēys* (for example, one of her spirits had died peacefully in 'her' bed at the age of seventy-four). She was so clever that after two days the singer declared a stalemate, halting the transactions. But the fact that such 'resistance' was couched in terms that defied the ritual conventions only deepens my sense that some women at least realized

Far from working toward their emancipation, the ritual I have described is an assertive pedagogy and not a dialogue. Women are silenced through the interrogation, the symbolic decapitation, and the “tortures rituelles”...which invade their person and imprint on their beheaded bodies society’s ‘mark’ or ‘truth’ so that they will never forget it. Now these young women know not to venture beyond the boundary of the supervised, life-giving sexuality of the home, for it can lead only to madness, an utter absorption of wasteland symbolism by the self.¹⁰⁸

D. Conclusion

The predominance of women among the possessed is the most heavily researched topic within the study of exorcism. This section has been dedicated to exploring the particulars of three social narratives that I have constructed around the most recurrent positions within the scholarship. The projective protest thesis – as seen in the work of Gananath Obeyesekere, Yoram Bilu, I.M. Lewis, Dorothy Hodgson, and Vincent Crapanzano – crafts a social narrative where especially marginalized women willingly embrace the idiom of spirit possession and imbue this culturally accepted form of ecstatic behavior with their rebellious frustrations. Exorcism is then an effort on behalf of the male oppressors to re-impose the patriarchal order and reintegrate these frustrated women back into their normal societal roles. Though temporary, women are granted a certain degree of social leverage through their participation in this cultural system of exorcism. Though it is debated as to how successful this system is at implementing change to the social plight of women in their communities, what matters in this hypothesis is the platform women are given to articulate their individual and collective resentments towards men.

The cultural custom thesis, constructed primarily through the work of Bruce Kapferer and Nancy Caciola, removes any ulterior motivation for women to freely undergo the ritual

that this exorcism worked by objectifying them as aberrantly sexual, demonic, and crazed beings. If the ritual was to successfully achieve these objectifications, its entire discourse had to bar this sort of awareness, and generally succeeded.”

¹⁰⁸ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 99.

of exorcism. Under this narrative, the performance of women among the possessed can be explained as the cultural result of a shared set of religious assumptions regarding the relationship between women and the demonic. The propensity of women to suffer demonic illness can be explained without a reduction to psychological production, i.e. cultural attitudes exist that render women more religiously impure, mentally and spiritually weaker, and physiologically more receptive to demonic impressions than their male counterparts. Women can also serve as a proxy for the family unit given their cultural place in the household (the microcosm of the universe), whereby exorcising one consequently exorcises the other. This social commentary, like the previous hypothesis, still allows room for self-reflection on behalf of the recipient of the exorcism. However, men and women alike collectively reflect on the fragile order of their cultural system and its need to be regularly restored through ritual.

Social coercion and blatant oppression then rest at the center of the final explanation as to why women overwhelmingly comprise the set of individuals who undergo exorcism. The pigeon-hole thesis, a social narrative constructed from the writings of Michael de Certeau, R.L. Stirrat, and Isabelle Nabokov, purports that women (and other low-ranking members of society) are forced and bullied into receiving exorcisms, interpreting the ritual as a public shaming of heterogeneity. The idiom of spirit possession does not belong to the “afflicted” individual but to the relatives and neighbors that impose it upon them; the idiom belongs to those with the cultural power to refashion the personal predicaments of their subordinates within a single cosmological framework. This is a social narrative of subordination and dominance. Here, the predominance of women among the possessed cannot be explained as

a result of a particular set of religious assumptions which constrain thought and behavior in some “strait-jacket” fashion.¹⁰⁹

All three of these explanations are valid and appropriate for the particular regions and cultural contexts. But so often, these social commentaries reduce exorcism phenomena to a confrontation between traditional social binaries like gender, a confrontation between the ritual specialist and the recipient of the ritual. For instance, consider the following analysis from Obeyesekere on the exorcism of a woman named Somavati:

On the cultural level, the first part of the preceding episode [the exorcist’s harsh treatment of Somavati] deals with the taming of the recalcitrant demons by the superordinate god. On the psychological level, it is the attempt by the *Kapurala* and his assistant to overcome Somavati’s resistance and establish their control over her. [...] On the cultural level, the demons have capitulated to the superior gods and acknowledged their power; the god waves his rod and the demons crawl on the floor. On the psychological level, it is Somavati’s self-abnegation; she literally grovels in the dust at the feet of the priests, and later of the deities. She is broken, humiliated, made abject, and made pliable psychologically.¹¹⁰

For exorcism, there is always a story being told in space. How then do these social dynamics between “players” influence the “gameplay” and the “field of play”? In Somavati’s case, vertical positioning signifies power. The male priests stand firm and fixed in their position while the female demoniac squirms in pain. Thus, these social relationships also influence the movement of the participants during the ritual.

I submit that social commentaries alone are weak to highlight the ritual mechanics and physical characteristics of exorcism. Many of the properties listed in the “field manual” of Section I would simply not be examined within such a social focus. But what if we examine an exorcism case where the exorcist is no longer quite human? The exorcism still proceeds

¹⁰⁹ See FN 89.

¹¹⁰ Obeyesekere, “Psychocultural Exegesis,” 279-280.

along an authoritative, hegemonic design but there are other dynamics involved. Consider the following case from Beatrix Pfleiderer (1981):

For the last seventeen months [Mr. G.R.] has been staying [at the Mira Datar Dargah]. Whenever his condition deteriorates, he feels that a *bhut* is entering his body. Then he sits in the *dargah* which makes him feel much better. [...] In his dreams, Mira Datar appears as a doctor or a police inspector, promising him the restoration of his health.¹¹¹

What do we make of this phenomenon where the “exorcist” is a holy site? This case of “Mr. G.R.” reveals how a place can be empowered by the various cultural entities associated with it; how that power operates according to a specific set of spatial mechanics. “The holiness inside the *dargah* increases as one comes closer to the tomb.”¹¹² The religious orientations and social divisions are still significant in this example. “The roofed area around the tomb is divided into a women’s and a men’s wing, the latter being on the holy, Mecca-oriented side.”¹¹³ “In most shrines women are not admitted into the interior of the tomb. They have to perform prayers, burn incense and make offerings, outside the walls of the inner sanctum.”¹¹⁴ The central/peripheral binary¹¹⁵ is still relevant to this example. But what matters is how this alterity is enacted in space. Not only are men and women divided according to the exposure of the holiness, but bhuts are also positioned beyond the periphery of the *dargah* while the afflicted visitors circumambulate its center.

A spatial analysis of exorcism presents scholars with a particular set of questions: Where are the participants in the ritual located? Who gets to speak (to whom) and when? What direction do they face? Are they forced to move or are they immobilized? How do they

¹¹¹ Beatrix Pfleiderer, “Mira Datar Dargah,” in *Ritual and Religion among Muslims in India*, ed. Imtiaz Ahmad (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), 226.

¹¹² Pfleiderer, “Mira Datar Dargah,” 198.

¹¹³ Pfleiderer, “Mira Datar Dargah,” 206.

¹¹⁴ Pfleiderer, “Mira Datar Dargah,” 198.

¹¹⁵ See FN 35.

interact with the sacred? Are there spectators? Most of these questions will not be addressed until Section IV. The next section is then dedicated to the last of the social binaries (or alterities) engaged through the practice of exorcism: health and sickness. The case of “Mr. G.R.” and the three hypotheses from this section will be mentioned again.

Tarantism is regarded by de Martino as “choreographo-chromatico-musical exorcism” that primarily functions as a psychic release mechanism, so that the spider’s bite, which is more often imaginary than real, operates on the symbolic level and provides the opportunity for the cure.¹¹⁶

III. The Ritual Efficacy of Exorcism

What are the mechanisms that allow exorcisms to *work*? To answer this, we look to the scholars who present exorcism as a therapeutic enterprise.¹¹⁷ William Sax, in particular, has proposed three hypotheses regarding the ritual efficacy¹¹⁸ of exorcism, each of which focuses on a different mechanism that rehabilitates the patient’s condition. The first hypothesis, the *placebo thesis*, proposes that exorcism rituals are successful at physically altering the body of the patient and that the efficacy of the ritual resides in the patient’s expectation of healing. This thesis is supported by the research of medical anthropologists like Howard Brody, Daniel Moerman, Amanda Zieselman, and Ted Kaptchuk – all of which

¹¹⁶ Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 163.

¹¹⁷ Sax, *God of Justice*, 240. “To put it in a nutshell, rituals dramatically and authoritatively represent some condition or state of affairs, and by participating in the ritual, members of the community affirm the truth of this representation. But such a definition does not seem immediately applicable to ritual healing. How could a ‘mere’ ritual heal cancer, or the flu, or a broken leg? Posing the question in this way returns us to the problem with which I began: the implausibility (to ‘modern,’ rational, post-Enlightenment intellectuals) that a ritual could be of therapeutic value.” See also William S. Sax, “Ritual and the Problem of Efficacy,” in *Problem of Ritual Efficacy*, eds. William S. Sax, Jan Weinhold, and Johannes Quack (New York: Oxford UP, 2010).

¹¹⁸ Sax, *God of Justice*, 238. “[F]or those performing the rain dance, or the initiation, or the healing, the practices we call rituals are indeed consistent with a cosmology, in terms of which they perfectly logical and rational. [...] To put it in a nutshell: what *we* see as ritual, *they* see as technique. My point is that the term ‘ritual’ is our term, and it reflects out problem – how to classify a certain set of apparently irrational, or better, apparently *ineffective*, acts. But the problem is a false one, because not all rituals are ineffective. We know that shamanistic rituals heal, legal rituals bind, political rituals ratify, and religious rituals sanctify. Rituals transform public space into prohibited sanctuary, citizens into presidents, single persons into married couples, and even, according to some, wine into blood.”

argue that a well-designed, totally inert, substance, stage prop, or ritual (“placebos”) can produce observable physiological changes in the direction of restored health. There are many cultural mechanisms that make this possible, namely the patient’s trust in the treatment and the cultural attitudes towards the paraphernalia and setting of the treatment.

The second hypothesis, the *psychic release thesis*, proposes that ritual healing generally “works” by altering the consciousness of the patient, not the body. Because no actual physiological change occurs, proponents of this thesis – namely Yoram Bilu and Thomas Csordas – study the “persuasive” powers of the healer (or ritual specialist) and the malleable individual psyche of the patient. Alternate forms of medicine and treatment are largely successful because the patient has been engulfed by an etiological system that, first, coheres with his/her lived experiences and, second, provides a cultural venue where healing is possible. Like the cultural custom thesis of the previous section, this hypothesis centers its analysis on the shared set of religious assumptions that make ritual healing successful. Moreover, the cultural mechanisms triggered during this healing process include the patient’s degree of socialization into the role of the “afflicted,” the healer’s ability to craft a persuasive explanatory scheme regarding the nature and cause of their “affliction,” and a platform for the patient (or supplicant) to externalize the individual components of their psyche.

The “psychic release” refers to a therapeutic engagement with a person’s fetishes, phobias, traumas, and other idiosyncrasies. In contrast to traditional medical procedures, exorcism rituals (according to this hypothesis) are not experienced passively. The “afflicted” patient actively participates in their personal transformation – arguably more consciously than in the placebo drama outlined in the previous hypothesis. The placebo effect equally

involves a patient's degree of socialization into the role of the "sick" or "injured" and the medical practitioner's ability to craft a persuasive explanation of the patient's condition, diagnosis, and treatment. This mechanism of externalization, however, is distinct to the psychic release thesis – rendering exorcism as a form of psychological therapy, efficacious in its engagement with an individual's mental faculties.

The third hypothesis that William Sax proposes regarding the efficacy of ritual healing posits that no direct change actually occurs at the level of the body or mind of the patient. Healing rituals like exorcism "work" by altering the "social field" of the patient, i.e. that often a household, family, lineage, neighborhood, or village is the object of the therapy and not the individual patient. If the placebo thesis classifies exorcism as a form of *physical* therapy and the psychic release thesis refashioned the ritual into a form of *psychological* therapy, Sax's third hypothesis renders exorcism as a form of *social* therapy. The *social field thesis*, as I have called it, characterizes much of Sax's work. As he writes: "[R]itual healing sometimes 'works' by addressing the social causes of stress-related disorders."¹¹⁹

This is the analytic bridge to the previous section. None of the three hypotheses regarding the predominance of women among the possessed (the projective protest thesis, cultural custom thesis, and pigeon-hole thesis) are really concerned with the physiological or mental diagnoses of the individuals that undergo exorcism. For the scholars of the previous section, that is not why women have been consistently targeted for exorcism. The women are the proxy "object of therapy," exorcising them exorcises the entire household, family, neighborhood, or village of social disorder.

¹¹⁹ Sax, *God of Justice*, 231.

Before we unpack the various ways that anthropologists and sociologists have studied exorcism with respect to the “healthy/sick” social dynamic, we will first discuss what is meant by words like “therapy,” “treatment,” and other medical discourse. We shall see that for William Sax and other scholars exorcism is situated within the interrelated contemporary paradigms of “science,” “modernity,” and “development” – all of which must reject the theories and practices associated with ritual healing and alternative medicine.¹²⁰

As Vincent Crapanzano (1973) explains:

Therapy¹²¹ is considered to be a structured set of procedures for the rehabilitation of an incapacitated individual – an individual who is, from a sociological perspective, unable to meet role expectations and effectively perform valued tasks. Therapeutic procedures effect changes in the ailing individual’s social situation as well as in his physical and psychological condition. He is moved through the roles of sick person and patient back, in the case of successful treatment, to his original role. If the treatment is not completely successful, he may be regarded as “a chronic case,” or as handicapped. The ideal is of course full restoration to his “old self.”¹²²

Much of the medical anthropology scholarship is designed to unpack concepts of illness and healing as manifestations of culturally specific notions of *selfhood*. According to Suzanne Crawford O'Brien, selfhood refers to a complex interplay between embodied experience and cultural experience. *Self* is then an inherently relational concept, defined by

¹²⁰ Sax, *God of Justice*, 232.

¹²¹ Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, xiv. “It would be perverse, moreover, to ignore the explicit views of those involved who choose to present possession as therapeutic and in modern terms ‘medical’.... This comes out clearly in [the] Brazilian Umbanda where spirit mediums wear nurses’ uniforms and, in the name of their spirits, hold clinics for spiritual healing. In a recent short field-study in Malaysia, I found exactly the same ‘medicalization’ well established in the healing practise of spirit-inspired bomohs with ‘clinics’ modelled on those of local doctors.”

¹²² Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha*, 5.

its relationships with others (humans and non-humans alike). When these relationships are strong and well-balanced, wellness and health ensues.¹²³ As Sax puts it:

To be healthy is to be whole, and to heal is to make a fragmented, sick person into a whole person, complete and holy. [...] To heal, then, is to restore well-being to a person who is ill, and that well-being is not only a matter of their physical condition, but also of social and interpersonal relationships.¹²⁴

A healthy person is one who is able to assume in mind and body what Jerome Levi called a “working identity,” “engaging a fully functioning self with the give and take of social life.”¹²⁵

These medical anthropologists also seem to attribute more agency to the patient than either Stirrat or Nabokov. Recall that these proponents of the pigeon-hole thesis from Section II argued that certain marginalized individuals are bullied and coerced, first, into the cultural role of the “afflicted” and, second, into the culturally patterned ritual of restoration (exorcism). Robert A. Hahn then clarifies his opposing distinction: “The anthropological notion I formulate defines sickness essentially from the perspective of the patient, who determines the work of the healer.”¹²⁶ In this system, the sickness label is not forced onto the individual by their neighbors, relatives, or even the ritual specialist. Because of this, Hahn broadly defines sickness as “unwanted conditions of self.” Unwanted conditions may then include states of any part of a person – body, mind, experience, and even relationships.

¹²³ Suzanne J. Crawford O’Brien, introduction to *Religion and Healing in Native America* (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 4-5, 12.

¹²⁴ Sax, *God of Justice*, 242.

¹²⁵ Jerome Levi, “The Embodiment of a Working Identity,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1999), 14, 31. Cf. Howard Brody, “Ritual, Medicine, and the Placebo Response,” in *Problem of Ritual Efficacy*, 153. “Healing rituals fall within the larger category of restorative rituals – the sick person is ill or is in a state of disharmony with nature, and the ritual’s purpose is to restore health and harmony.”

¹²⁶ Robert Hahn, *Sickness and Healing* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), 6-7.

“Unwantedness comes in degrees, and individuals may have different thresholds regarding just how seriously unwanted a condition must be in order to qualify as sickness.”¹²⁷

How then do we reconcile this patient-centered formulation of “sickness” with the hegemonic forces that socialize low-ranking members of society into the roles of the “sick”? Recall Stirrat’s argument regarding the objectification of the sick:

Illness...does not simply exist: it has to be recognized as existing.¹²⁸ On the one hand this involves a series of collective representations: an ideology of illness. On the other it involves a series of people who declare or define the subject as being ill. An individual finds it difficult to declare himself ill: illness depends upon others and it is these others who ultimately define the subject as ill or not ill.¹²⁹

Sickness and healing are the symbolic bridges that connect the body, self, and society (Kleinman xiii). Thus, we require a language for discerning the level where the “unhealthy” condition operates and who is in control of its discourse.

Arthur Kleinman (1988, along with Sung, 1979) has then offered a preliminary distinction between the various types of threats to wellness and health: disease, illness, and sickness. *Disease* is reserved for any primary malfunctioning in biological and psychological processes (including the lived experiences of the affliction or injury and the diagnosis of the condition from either medical or religious practitioners). *Illness* refers to the

¹²⁷ Hahn, *Sickness and Healing*, 22. Cf. *Sickness and Healing*, 5. “Sicknesses represent and express the particularities of individual patients within a society. What counts as sickness and health may differ for a four-minute miler, a lower-limb amputee, an opera singer, and most of the rest of us. What causes the sickness may be environmental conditions or pathogens, the patient's physiology, or harmful behaviors. What defines the event for which we seek a cause, however, may be not the patient's body, behaviors, or potentially harmful environment occurrences – its possible causes - but rather his or her subjective experience and values.”

¹²⁸ Cf. Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha*, 5. “Aside from techniques designed to alter the physical and psychological condition of the patient and his social situation, a therapy must provide the distressed individual, the curer or curers, and other members of society with an explanation of the illness and a theory of cure.”

¹²⁹ Stirrat, “Demonic Possession in Roman Catholic Sri Lanka,” 152.

secondary psychosocial and cultural responses to disease, specifically how the patient, family, and immediate social network react to the disease of the afflicted.¹³⁰ *Sickness* then operates in a generic sense across a population in relation to macrosocial forces (e.g. introducing economic, political, and/or institutional side effects).¹³¹ But this all still seems clearly reactionary to the individual's condition. Kleinman's tripartite system is effective at distinguishing the multi-layered experience of being "unhealthy." But he is less sensitive to when individuals are initially *marked* as "unhealthy" – independent of their own supplication for treatment. This is a large disconnect between these two schools of thought (Sections II and III).

Luckily, this thesis is not ultimately concerned with either the predominance of women among the possessed or the ritual efficacy of exorcism. I instead propose a new direction for the study of exorcism: *space* – the details of which will be fully explored in Section IV. In the meantime, let us not forget just how important exorcism is to the study of many traditional socio-religious binaries: male/female, sacred/profane, human/superhuman, central/peripheral, and healthy/sick. I hope that the various cultural mechanisms that allow these binaries to function within exorcism illustrate the complex conglomerate of social agency.

¹³⁰ Arthur Kleinman and Liliias H. Sung, "Why Do Indigenous Practitioners Successfully Heal?", *Social Science and Medicine* 13B (1979), 8. Cf. Crawford O'Brien, introduction to *Religion and Healing in Native America*, 4. "If the disease is breast cancer, the illness might include the effects of chemotherapy, the compromised sense of identity as a woman following a mastectomy, the impact of sickness on one's children and spouse, or the impact it may have upon professional, emotional, or spiritual life. If disease can be reduced to a single cause and a single concern, illness is the impact of that ailment on a person's entire sense of self, their family, and their community."

¹³¹ Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives* (New York: Basic, 1988), 6.

It is never quite clear how many social entities are operating at a given time. This section will demonstrate that in a world of culturally postulated superhuman beings, placebos, and fields of discourse, humans are entangled within a web of dynamic relationships. Social agency and power can be found among all sorts of non-human entities, e.g. objects, places, words, organizations, cultural hegemonies, and the like. As in the case of “Mr. G.R.,” how are we to understand an exorcism case where the “exorcist” is a tomb of a Muslim saint? Section IV will also feature multiple cases with non-human recipients of exorcism. To return to our topological understanding of space, any area or object that can be occupied and/or used is of interest to our study. Space, however, is not a vacuum. It is full of people, places, and objects – our *neighbors*, as it were. Section III will demonstrate that people are always caught in relationships with other entities within a given space. The agency allotted to our neighbors is crucial to a deeper understanding of exorcism.

A. The Placebo Thesis

What are the cultural mechanisms that allow exorcism to function? According to the first hypothesis, exorcistic rituals are successful at *altering the body* of the patient. Howard Brody (2010) and others would classify this phenomenon as a “placebo response,” specifically under the domain of the *expectancy theory* of ritual efficacy. According to this theory, the mere belief that something will happen sometimes produces bodily responses that confirm the expectation. As Brody argues:

[E]xpectancy involves activation of specific areas in the brain that are in turn capable of activating other brain areas that alter peripheral physiology, via neural, hormonal, or immunological mechanisms. The final result is that alterations in bodily function occur that move the patient in the direction of restored health.¹³²

¹³² Brody, “Ritual, Medicine, and the Placebo Response,” 155.

For example, one of the simplest and most common rituals in medicine is the repetitive swallowing of a pill. Research shows that a placebo pill administered four times a day is generally more effective than a placebo administered twice a day.¹³³ The same can be said for administering larger pills over smaller ones and brand-names over generics.¹³⁴ Blue pills seem to make better sleeping pills than other colors. Capsules work better than tablets and shots work better than pills (even if both are inert). As Daniel Moerman writes:

The direct pressure of a bandage on a cut finger might facilitate its healing. Meaning responses follow from the interaction with the context in which healing occurs - with the “power” of the laser in surgery,¹³⁵ or with the red color of the pill that contains stimulating medication. Sometimes, a bandage on a cut finger works better if it has a picture of Snoopy on it.¹³⁶

Thus, treatment paraphernalia and setting affect the impact of a placebo’s performance.¹³⁷ “Meaning can make your immune system work better, and it can make your aspirin work better, too.”¹³⁸

A “placebo” is then an *inert* form of treatment that has a biological effect on the body due to the patient’s perceived medical improvement. It then seems paradoxical to say that

¹³³ Brody, “Ritual, Medicine, and the Placebo Response,” 160.

¹³⁴ Amanda Zieselman, “The Placebo Effect,” *Dartmouth Undergraduate Journal of Science* (Fall 2012), 23. Cf. Ted J. Kaptchuk, “The Placebo Effect in Alternative Medicine,” *Ann Intern Med.* 136, no. 11 (2002), 820. “A ‘brand-name’ therapy that includes either active or inert ingredients may often yield better results than an identical treatment that is not as well known, and devices or elaborate procedures can have greater placebo effects than pills.”

¹³⁵ Daniel E. Moerman, *The Meaning Response* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002), 66. “Surgery works better yet, even if it sometimes doesn’t actually do anything to the person being operated on. High-powered machines with snappy names, especially one that remind us of video games, may be at the top of the heap. The form of medical treatment, not just its content, can have a dramatic effect on human wellbeing.”

¹³⁶ Moerman, *The Meaning Response*, 66, 16.

¹³⁷ Kaptchuk, “The Placebo Effect in Alternative Medicine,” 820.

¹³⁸ Moerman, *The Meaning Response*, 20.

placebos are inert given how they still manage to influence a person's health status.¹³⁹ As

Amanda Zieselman clarifies:

The placebo itself, being chemically inert, does not have an intrinsic value to a patient. It is the extrinsic circumstances surrounding the placebo, such as trust and care between physicians and their patients that give it a social and physical value resulting in the placebo effect. Thus, placebos hold the ability to transform our biomedical culture from focusing solely on developing impersonal technology and miracle drugs to also developing stronger doctor-patient relationships and a greater emphasis on the individual. It is not the medical properties of a placebo — be it in the form of a pill, injection, or sham surgery — that directly affect the patient, but rather the power of suggestion and the meaning surrounding it. The outside influence, that is, the ideas and notions that patients have about a treatment, form the mechanisms of the placebo effect. [...] This shows that a patient's knowledge, or presumed knowledge, of a procedure plays a large role in the efficacy of the treatment.¹⁴⁰

But what does this medical research have to do with exorcism and other healing rituals?

The scholars representing the first hypothesis argue that with good "showmanship," a well-designed, totally inert stage prop can produce exaggerated placebo effects.¹⁴¹ These placebo responses are made possible through the symbolic aspects of a therapeutic intervention.¹⁴²

These same scholars are then given the task of explaining why so many patients of Western medicine turn to alternative diagnoses. They ask questions such as:

Is indigenous healing effective? And if so, how? What role do cultural factors play in bringing about that efficacy? How does the efficacy of indigenous healing compare with that of professional clinical care? What does that comparison tell us about the nature of the healing process? And can we learn anything which might be practically applied either to the solution of extraordinary problems besetting contemporary health care or to the treatment of sickness in different societies?¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Brody, "Ritual, Medicine, and the Placebo Response," 151. "It will not do...to say that the placebo response is a change in health produced by an *inert* medication or other therapy, since inert remedies cannot, by definition, produce changes."

¹⁴⁰ Zieselman, "The Placebo Effect," 22.

¹⁴¹ Kaptchuk, "The Placebo Effect in Alternative Medicine," 820.

¹⁴² Brody, "Ritual, Medicine, and the Placebo Response," 151.

¹⁴³ Kleinman and Sung, "Indigenous Practitioners," 7. Cf. Kaptchuk, "The Placebo Effect in Alternative Medicine," 817. "Can an alternative ritual with only nonspecific psychosocial effects have more positive health outcomes than a proven, specific

According to Ted J. Kaptchuk, performative efficacy relies on the “power of belief, imagination, symbols, meaning, expectation, persuasion, and self-relationship.” There are then five components of what he calls “the placebo drama” – patient, practitioner, patient–practitioner interaction, nature of the illness, and treatment and setting.¹⁴⁴ This “drama” is in no way limited to the prescription of chemically inert medications or procedures; the efficacy of conventional medical therapy also depends to a surprising degree on the patient–healer relationship and other components of the placebo drama.¹⁴⁵

Zieselman explains this further:

Another crucial element to the placebo effect is the empathy of the doctor involved. Patients desire a more personal relationship with doctors and do not want to be left entirely to their own devices, even when it seems no medical treatment will be effective. Thus, knowing the patient beyond a medical sense contributes greatly to the meaningfulness and the efficacy of the response. The healing process is not solely about the medicine; it is also about the symbolism and the ritual that accompany treatment. Different societies across the globe have accepted various symbols, including seemingly bizarre methods of treatments such as undressing in front of strangers and swallowing non-food items, as effective medical treatments. When rituals are filled with meaning they can serve as placebos.¹⁴⁶

Kleinman and Sung reached a similar concluding point: that indigenous healers are successful largely due to treating the person and not just the symptoms.

Problems in clinical care seem to arise when the practitioner is concerned only with curing the *disease*, and the patient is searching for treatment of his *illness*. Indigenous

conventional treatment? What makes therapy legitimate, positive clinical outcomes or culturally acceptable methods of attainment? Who decides?”

¹⁴⁴ Kaptchuk, “The Placebo Effect in Alternative Medicine,” 818.

¹⁴⁵ Zieselman, “The Placebo Effect,” 23. “Placebos have been shown to activate quantifiable changes in neurotransmitters, immune regulators, and hormones. Thus, even if the effect is ‘all in your head,’ that mentality leads to a measurable biological result.” It should be underscored that patient expectations influence the outcomes of both placebo and active treatment. See Kaptchuk, “The Placebo Effect in Alternative Medicine,” 818.

¹⁴⁶ Zieselman, “The Placebo Effect,” 22. Cf. Kaptchuk, “The Placebo Effect in Alternative Medicine,” 819. “The placebo drama is probably more successful if the patient and practitioner find each other’s beliefs and actions mutually credible or at least intriguing.”

folk practitioners in Taiwan seem to be generally more sensitive than Western-style doctors about treating *illness*, especially the personal and social problems it gives rise to.¹⁴⁷

Other scholars have noted that ritual healers, in addition to engaging the self (proper) and not just the physical body, likely listen more to their patients, provide patients with an illness explanation that coheres more with their general worldview, and bestow upon patients an enhanced sense of bodily and social control.¹⁴⁸ In the end, to return to Crawford O'Brien, the "embodied self" resides at the center of a web of dynamic relationships. "It is a place orientation," she writes, "a center from which one shapes one's relationships with the world around it." The self is then "continually in-process";¹⁴⁹ the right setting, practitioner, and treatment can then go a long way, according to this placebo hypothesis.

B. The Psychic Release Thesis

Distinct from the placebo drama, the second hypothesis proposes that ritual healing "works" by *altering the consciousness* of the patient. Here, there is no actual physiological change to the patient. The key elements of study are then not the symbols, meanings, and settings *per se*, but more so the "persuasive" powers of the healer and the malleable individual psyche of the patient.¹⁵⁰

Yoram Bilu's fieldwork among Moroccan migrants to Israel (1979, 1980) supports this second hypothesis. In particular, Bilu observed a specific sequence of steps used to diagnose an affliction as demonic in origin.¹⁵¹ While the patient provides the personal data

¹⁴⁷ Kleinman and Sung, "Indigenous Practitioners," 22.

¹⁴⁸ Brody, "Ritual, Medicine, and the Placebo Response," 161; Kaptchuk, "The Placebo Effect in Alternative Medicine," 819.

¹⁴⁹ Crawford O'Brien, introduction to *Religion and Healing in Native America*, 12.

¹⁵⁰ Sax, *God of Justice*, 245.

¹⁵¹ Yoram Bilu, "Demonic Explanations of Disease among Moroccan Jews in Israel," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 3 (1979), 368.

(the lived experience of the affliction), it is the local rabbi-healer who must provide a meaningful rationale that renders said data etiologically significant.¹⁵² Typically the rabbi-healer will craft a story about how the afflicted patient inadvertently injured an invisible jinn. Angered, the jinn retaliated, resulting in the emotional and physiological effects that the patient is experiencing. Finally, the jinn (whose personal data is also provided by the healer) must be confronted in order for the patient to be released from its influence.

All of this is feasible according to the patient's own timeline of events, i.e. when the unobserved injury to the jinn occurred, the vulnerability-increasing factors (personal/social signifiers) that allowed the jinn to strike with ease, and the onset of symptoms that led to the consultation of the rabbi-healer. The explanatory scheme of jinn produced diseases could then not exist, Bilu argues, without this fusion between the patients' and healers' reports. In order for the patient to be persuaded that healing is possible, the rabbi-healer must first provide an etiological system that coheres with the lived experience of the afflicted.¹⁵³

Bilu then takes this hypothesis a step further, arguing that "evil spirit disease" and the like should also be approached as *culture-bound syndromes*, dependent on the patient's degree of socialization into the role of the afflicted.¹⁵⁴ For Bilu, these "afflictions" are the work of cultural imagination and thereby can be "cured" by the same mechanism that created them. He is confident in this theory's application to his own data due to his observation that most jinn produced afflictions are manifested mentally rather than physically.¹⁵⁵ Moroccans are then culturally provided a specific repertoire for expressing

¹⁵² Bilu, "Demonic Explanations," 363, 372.

¹⁵³ Bilu, "Demonic Explanations," 375-376.

¹⁵⁴ Bilu, "The Moroccan Demon in Israel," 37-38.

¹⁵⁵ Bilu, "Demonic Explanations," 378-379.

emotional and psychological distress, a repertoire that dissipates after their exorcism by the rabbi-healer. If the jinn are going to then continue as explanatory agents for diseases with strong mental components among Moroccan migrants to Israel, the newer generations must be persuaded or taught as their parents were.¹⁵⁶ Either way, according to this second hypothesis, the psychic release thesis,¹⁵⁷ the way in which exorcism “works” is by altering the consciousness of its recipients.

How then are notions of selfhood related to this process of culture-bound syndromes? To answer this, I believe it would be useful to quickly address the types of personal changes that could occur during an exorcism. David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa, following Moshe Idel (1999), utilize a problematic typological distinction between individual transformations that are “centrifugal” (relatively loosely organized, with subtle and fairly easy transitions across internal boundaries) and those of a more “centripetal” character (which are more starkly set off from the surrounding external contexts). As Shulman and Stroumsa elaborate:

Centrifugal configurations seem to be correlated with the more gradual modes of working upon an always changing, usually unstable self, with the concomitant qualities of poignant paradoxically and recursivity coloring the cultural vision of inner change. Centripetal transformation tends to the conflictual, to experiences of dramatic rupture and irreversible movement into a new identity or ontic domain, to strong attempts at exorcism and a renewal of clearly articulated boundaries, both within and without.¹⁵⁸

To be clear, it is not so much that Shulman and Stroumsa have adopted a false dichotomy, but rather that their description of exorcism as a centripetal configuration (a

¹⁵⁶ Bilu, “The Moroccan Demon in Israel,” 30.

¹⁵⁷ The title comes from Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 163.

¹⁵⁸ David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa, “Introduction: Persons, Passages, and Shifting Cultural Space,” in *Self and Self-transformation in the History of Religions*, eds. David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 13.

drastic eruption of character) does not hold for all cases. Consider the work of Thomas Csordas (whose 1994 report surveyed Catholic charismatic communities in southeastern New England). For starters, the charismatic healing phenomenon, he argues, relies not just on the healer-patient relationship – the focus of Bilu’s research (1979/1980) – but on a larger cultural system. While the healers do demonstrate their power on the bodies of their clients, much of the ritual practice involves relatively impersonal public healing services. While the healer may at times subjugate (or objectify) the client (designating them as one in need of healing), it is the larger cultural system that makes this possible. So much so that many of the clients seek out the healers having already subjugated themselves as a patient in need.¹⁵⁹ Csordas, however, is not too interested in the gender dynamics of his subjects. But for our purposes, his research resonates with the cultural custom thesis of Kapferer and Caciola – and clashes with the pigeon-hole thesis of De Certeau, Stirrat, and Nabokov. Csordas even incorporates this difference in his nomenclature for the possessed, favoring the term “suppliant” over “patient,” “demoniac,” “energumen,” and the like.

Csordas’ work then reveals that exorcism can be viewed as a gradual process and not just result in a sudden, dramatic transformation. The idea of a miraculous cure fails to capture the kind of effects found in the charismatic communities he observed. What actually occurs, he says, is a process of *incremental change*. “Healing is much more like planting a seed, or like nudging a rolling ball to slightly change its trajectory so that it ends up in a different place, than it is like lightning striking or mountains moving.”¹⁶⁰ The key to Csordas’ distinction of incremental change – and why it aptly characterizes the psychic

¹⁵⁹ Csordas, *The Sacred Self*, 55-56.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas J. Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 5.

release thesis – is the lower expectations; minimizing the outcome allows the efficacy of the ritual to be more easily accepted. Akin to Bilu's argument (1979/1980), what matters is then of what the supplicant can be persuaded.

For Csordas, the *rhetoric* of the healing performance seeks to accomplish the following tasks:

(1) Predisposition – within the context of the primary community of reference, the supplicant must be persuaded that healing is possible, that the group's claims in this respect are coherent and legitimate; (2) Empowerment – the supplicant must be persuaded that the therapy is efficacious – that he is experiencing the healing effects of spiritual power; and (3) Transformation – the supplicant must be persuaded to change – that is, he must accept the cognitive/affective, behavioral transformation that constitutes healing within the religious system.¹⁶¹

This rhetoric is then delivered in a variety of settings, as the occasion for ritual healing has intensified among charismatic communities. Large healing services originated at the periodic conferences (both national and regional) in which movement participants assemble both to show their strength and unity and to worship and teach. From the late 1970s to the late 1980s these conference sessions evolved into public healing services, and then into segments of smaller weekly prayer meetings. Separate "healing rooms" and private sessions followed, led by a specially chosen team of healing ministers, and the most serious and profound healing takes place in such sessions. More intensive group healing also occurs in smaller day-long or weekend retreats and "days of renewal."¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing*, 27.

¹⁶² Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing*, 16. "Some of those who practice in the private setting also have professional training in counseling or psychotherapy and integrate these practices with ritual healing. In addition, private healing prayer sometimes occurs over the telephone. The most highly organized communities also incorporate forms of pastoral counseling into their everyday activities. Finally, healing prayer for oneself or others may be practiced in the solitude of private devotion."

But as mentioned above, despite the availability of ritual healing, Csordas is adamant that the charismatic healing

phenomenon is made possible through many of the supplicants seeking out the services of the healers. Moreover, he also makes clear that charismatic healing is esoteric in that it is available only to those who have already experienced at least a minimal degree of participation in the movement.

Participants in Catholic Pentecostalism seldom become involved primarily as a result of seeking healing. Other personal or religious reasons lead most participants to the prayer groups or communities; the prayer meeting is the first ritual setting to which most Catholic Pentecostals are exposed, and only with deepening involvement do they experience the forms of healing described here. These two facts – the esoteric nature of Catholic Pentecostal healing and its secondary role in initiating involvement with the movement – indicate that the rhetoric of healing is derived from the larger field of discourse that defines the movement as a whole.¹⁶³

It should also be noted that the charismatic healing phenomenon does not exist in a singularity. There are three distinct but interrelated¹⁶⁴ types of healing: *physical healing* of bodily illness, *inner healing* of emotional illness and distress, and *deliverance* from the adverse effects of demons or evil spirits.¹⁶⁵ The latter is most important to Csordas' argument.

The basic endogenous process activated in Deliverance is externalization. ... [T]he names of demons from whose influence people are delivered indicate that they are spiritual entities that control particular sins, vices, character flaws, personal weaknesses, or negative affective states. Although the healer sometimes discerns the presence of evil spirits, and constructs the interpretation of their action in clusters, the spirits are usually

¹⁶³ Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing*, 27.

¹⁶⁴ See Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing*, 14. "In elaborating this system, Catholic Pentecostals believe that they are serving God's intention to 'heal the whole man': body, soul, psyche, and relationships with others. While healing ministers tend to specialize, most recognize the necessity, at times, of using all three forms in varying combinations."

¹⁶⁵ For a thorough breakdown, see Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing*, 14.

identified by the suppliant himself.¹⁶⁶

The exorcism system in this context (performative rituals) is not as oppressive as what we previously discussed in the pigeon-hole thesis (prescriptive rituals). In contrast to traditional medical procedures, this exorcism ritual is also not experienced passively. Here, the suppliant actively participates in their transformation – a reality that certain scholars have used to argue for why the afflicted may turn to religious forms of medical treatment. Thus, the psychic release thesis argues that people can be led to believe that an individual transformation is occurring. Regardless of the type of personal configuration (centrifugal or centripetal) or the manner in which they were convinced (due to the work of a persuasive practitioner or the result of a much larger field of discourse), the resulting transformation is still perceived as significant by the individual.

C. The Social Field Thesis

The final hypothesis regarding the efficacy of ritual healing proposes that exorcism “works” by *altering the social field* of the patient, i.e. that the individual patient is not the object of therapy. This hypothesis characterizes much of William Sax’s own work. As he writes:

It can plausibly be argued that many of the illnesses for which ritual healing is an effective remedy are caused by stressful relationship within the family, village, or workplace. In such cases, the healing ritual “works” by reorganizing and redefining these relationships, and the object of therapy is not an individual but a larger group, not

¹⁶⁶ Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing*, 35. Cf. *The Sacred Self*, 181. “During the Renaissance, the golden age of Christian demonologies, each demon characteristically had both a personal name and a principal attribute, a sin to which it had the power to tempt people.” The contemporary demonology Csordas examines seems to be a close cousin of this medieval system. Cf. *The Sacred Self*, 189. “For most Charismatic healers who practice deliverance, however, knowledge of the demonic hierarchy appears to be limited to the pragmatic awareness that evil spirits tend to operate in ‘clusters’ consisting of a ‘manager’ or ‘ruler’ spirit and various ‘attending’ spirits.”

particular disease or illness episode, but rather the general condition of the social unit.¹⁶⁷

This social field thesis has already been explored in Section II – a fusion of all three social narratives that explain the predominance of women among the possessed. In short, when the women of Tanzania resort to spirit possession and exorcism as an indirect means of challenging their domestic abusers (projective protest); when Sinhalese women receive exorcisms in the front yards of their homes due to the collective cultural order (cultural custom); and when Tamil women are pressured into exorcism rituals because of their withdrawn and sexually aberrant behavior (pigeon-hole); this supports the social field thesis.¹⁶⁸

D. Conclusion

Alternative forms of medicine and treatment represent a threat to the dominant Western narratives of “science,” “modernity,” and “development.” Scholars then have to craft explanations for why so many patients of conventional medical therapy achieve a restoration of health through religious healing and ritual. Three hypotheses have been presented in Section III, each of which focuses on a different cultural mechanism that allows exorcism to function. The first hypothesis, the placebo thesis, proposes that healing rituals like exorcism are successful at physically altering the body of the patient; that the efficacy of the ritual resides in the patient’s expectation of healing. The research of medical anthropologists like Howard Brody, Daniel Moerman, Amanda Zieselman, and Ted Kaptchuk support the central premise of this thesis: that a well-designed, totally-inert substance, stage prop, or ritual

¹⁶⁷ Sax, *God of Justice*, 245. Cf. *God of Justice*, 242. “Healing (as opposed to curing) does not affect only the body; it affects the entire human being. It does not only work on the parts of the body, it also integrates those parts into a healthy person, and it integrates that person with his or her society, sometimes even with the cosmos.”

¹⁶⁸ For this reason, Section II is titled “The Gender Dynamics of the Social Field.”

(placebos) can produce observable physiological changes in the direction of restored health. There are many cultural mechanisms that contribute to this placebo drama, mainly the patient's trust in the treatment and the cultural attitudes toward the paraphernalia and setting of the treatment. Note that this thesis equally applies to conventional medical practices as well.

The second hypothesis, the psychic release thesis, then proposes that ritual healing generally "works" by altering the consciousness of the patient, not the body. When studying exorcism, proponents of this thesis (like Yoram Bilu and Thomas Csordas) focus on the persuasive powers of the healer or practitioner and the malleable individual psyche of the patient. The cultural mechanisms that then make exorcism successful include the patient's degree of socialization into the role of the "afflicted," the healer's ability to craft a persuasive explanatory scheme regarding the nature and cause of their "affliction," and/or a platform for the patient (or supplicant) to externalize the individual components of their psyche. In contrast to traditional medical procedures, the ritual of exorcism is not experienced passively as the patient orchestrates the terms of their transformation. Thus, given that the "affliction" is purely psychological (according to this hypothesis), the same cultural imagination that created it is also its cure. Patients must either be persuaded into some highly regimented form of treatment or engulfed into an established etiological system whereby they individually provide the terms of their recovery.

The third hypothesis, the social field thesis, proposes that the individual patients subject to ritual healing are actually not the object of therapy; that rituals like exorcism are successful at altering the social tensions within the household, family, lineage, neighborhood, or village. Although this hypothesis characterizes much of William Sax's

work, it also speaks to the three hypotheses from Section II regarding the gender dynamics of the social field. Exorcism “works” either when women are given a platform to express themselves (and perhaps implement social change), when women serve as a communal proxy whenever ritually restoring the fragile cultural order, or when women are bullied out of their socially disruptive and sexually aberrant behaviors. As Yoram Bilu proposed, exorcism serves as a “cathartic acting-out” of the conflicts between various socio-religious binaries, namely sacred/profane, male/female, human/superhuman, central/peripheral, and healthy/sick.

Of these traditional binaries, this thesis is most concerned with the central/peripheral dynamic given its spatial framing. More will be said about the process of religious border making in the next section. In the meantime, let the reader understand that space is not a vacuum; it is full of people, places, objects, and the like. Section III has then demonstrated that people are always caught in relationships with other social and cultural entities within a given space. The agency allotted to our *neighbors*, as it were, is crucial to a deeper understanding of exorcism.

To reiterate Amanda Zieselman’s insightful observation: “When rituals are filled with meaning they can serve as placebos.” I believe it is important as scholars of religion to never lose track of people’s relationships to *non-human* entities.¹⁶⁹ For this reason, I have found it useful to employ Bruno Latour’s “actor-network” theory (ANT) in my study of exorcism. For Latour, “social aggregates” could denote individual agents, organizations, cultural institutions, public policies, and so forth.¹⁷⁰ The types of non-human entities that

¹⁶⁹ Case in point, later I reference an exorcizing Hanuman statue in Gujarat. See FN 257, 258.

¹⁷⁰ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 30.

concern us for this project (supernatural predators and pest, objects, places, etc.) may be productively given a place within this web of dynamic relationships.

In a world of culturally postulated superhuman beings, placebos, and fields of discourse,¹⁷¹ no one knows how many *actants* are simultaneously at work in any given situation.¹⁷² Actant is the theory's way of denoting a node or intersection in an actor-network, "a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled."¹⁷³ "To put it simply," Latour writes, "a good ANT account is a narrative or a description or a proposition where all the actors do something and don't just sit there."¹⁷⁴ The non-human entities listed above then "have to be actors and not simply the hapless bearers of symbolic projection."¹⁷⁵ The exorcist, in particular, is often a moving target with "a vast array of entities swarming around it"¹⁷⁶: their clothes, their tools, the words they speak, their assistants (of whatever realm), the deities they represent, the families who have hired them, etc. All of these social actants must be accounted for in any study of exorcism. "When we act, who else is acting? How many agents are also present?" Latour asks.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ Levi, "The Embodiment of a Working Identity," 38. "Although power may be regarded as concentrated in certain persons, places, times, or entities, it is ultimately a *relational* concept of control concerning the ability to produce the effect." The entities listed above then derive their power from the properties that human beings ascribe to them.

¹⁷² Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 54.

¹⁷³ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 43-44.

¹⁷⁴ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 128.

¹⁷⁵ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 46.

¹⁷⁷ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 43. Zieselman, Levi, and Latour have directly inspired two features found in my polythetic model: performative activity (speech, gestures, sounds, writings, etc.) and the formulation of a "quadralogue." The term comes from Brian Sutton-Smith, ed., *Play and Learning* (New York: Gardner, 1979), 297. I have modified it to include the practitioner, recipient, possessor, and audience. See FN 260 for an example of how this quadralogue (or network) functions in space.

The examples of exorcism throughout this thesis include instances of what Levi called “processual empowerment of a ‘powerless’ body,” which is accomplished by putting the patient directly in contact with (1) powerful agents, (2) powerful sites, and (3) practices of power.

Powerful agents are cultural entities, instruments, authorities, substances, beings, and personnel that are causative sources for transformative reactions in other beings. Powerful sites are spatio-temporal loci of ritual attention. Practices of power¹⁷⁸ are varieties of performance and experience.¹⁷⁹

Arguably, “Mr. G.R.” came into contact with all three at the Mira Datar Dargah, (1) when the Muslim saint appeared to the devotee in his dreams (2) after staying at the saint’s tomb for over a year and a half (3) performing prayers, making votive offerings, and ritually circumambulating the tomb’s center.

But, as mentioned before, this thesis will also include cases of non-human recipients of exorcism. To return to our topological understanding of space, any area or object that can be occupied and/or used is of interest to the current study. Like a Matriushka doll, spaces can be nested within other spaces, as when a possessing entity occupies the body and mind of “Mr. G.R.” while his body occupies the larger space that houses the tomb of the Muslim saint. Another Matriushka doll would be reports of ghosts residing in the toilet of the bathroom of a person’s house.¹⁸⁰ For this reason, I submit that space is the best heuristic available for scholars to engage the ritual mechanics of exorcism.

¹⁷⁸ Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, xiii. “Many of these rites could perhaps be described as ‘charismatic’ with a tremendous emphasis on ‘miraculous’ effects. The person who performs them is seen by supplicants to embody supernatural power the benefits of which can be transferred to them. In contrast, exorcists do not themselves embody transformational powers; rather this is the property of the specific rites they perform.”

¹⁷⁹ Levi, “The Embodiment of a Working Identity,” 31, 38.

¹⁸⁰ See FN 199.

IV. The Five Spatial Dimensions of Exorcism

As was discussed in Section I, the academic study of exorcism is theoretically weak and limited because the scholarship is so largely disjointed. This thesis is an effort to fill in the gaps of the literature, bringing together case studies from all over the world and throughout many centuries. Section IV is then my proposal to push the study of exorcism in a new direction. My goal is to engage the ritual mechanics of the phenomena, revealing the “ostension” of exorcism. I believe exorcism is quite ostensible in that one could easily identify patterns in the ways that people ritually interact/speak to each other and with their environment (objects, places, etc.).

To reiterate my “game” metaphor from Section I, exorcism should be interpreted as a form of “gameplay.” Sections II and III were devoted to examining the key “players” of the “game” and their relationships with each other. But still more needs to be said regarding the non-human “players” of the “game” and the general “field of play.” For this reason, I argue that *space* is the best heuristic available to study exorcism phenomena. This is not just to say that various spaces are appropriate locations for a cultural message to be delivered or empty positions that “players” simply occupy during “gameplay.” These are certainly the case, but much more importantly, as it relates to exorcism, space should also be studied as a coveted resource. “Players” take culturally regulated turns to compete for space as a piece of currency, a capital to be gained and used against others.

Every exorcism then involves the following three preconditions: (1) a space that features numerous occupants and users;¹⁸¹ (2) that some user/occupant wishes to regulate or manage the traffic, to designate or reinforce the *proper* activity within the space; and last, (3) if an

¹⁸¹ The distinction is inspired by Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 39.

exorcism takes place, it must be assumed that a spatial conflict first occurred. In short, the ritual is a spatial practice that implies the exclusivity and regulation of space.¹⁸² In particular, the second precondition (“the power play”) implies that a spatial or institutional localization of power is in place.¹⁸³ An exorcism is deployed upon a given space (objects, bodies, locations) whenever someone’s use of said space (demonic assault, sorcery, and witchcraft, not just possession) has been deemed in some way *improper*.¹⁸⁴ As a result, an occupant must be evicted, a user must be denied access, a connection must be severed, and/or a distance must be achieved. It is my thesis that exorcism seeks to resolve spatial tensions.

Before proceeding, a note should be made regarding the difference between *spaces* and *places*. Both can be composed of intersections of mobile and fixed elements.¹⁸⁵ Both can be bent and warped by their users and occupants. But places are designed to be more stable. Space, according to Philip Sheldrake, is “an abstract analytical concept whereas place is always tangible, physical, specific and relational.”¹⁸⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan conceptualizes space around movement, arguing that places are then meaningful “pauses” in movement.¹⁸⁷ “When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place.”¹⁸⁸ There are then several human factors that transform spaces into places, namely memory, history, identity, and ritual.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸² See Georg Simmel, *Simmel on Culture*, eds. Mike Featherstone and David Frisby (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997), 138.

¹⁸³ This understanding of the usage of space (“strategy” versus “tactic”) is inspired by Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: U of California, 1984), xix, 35-39.

¹⁸⁴ See FN 48.

¹⁸⁵ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.

¹⁸⁶ Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001), 7.

¹⁸⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1977), 12, 138.

¹⁸⁸ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 73.

¹⁸⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-places*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), 77-78.

Public and material reification are then at the heart of the perceived permanence of place.¹⁹⁰

“Place is whatever stable object catches our attention.”¹⁹¹ Place, for Tuan, is a special type of object.¹⁹² Of course place often operates differently due to its size and fixity – as objects are typically smaller and easier to move. But places and objects both orient movement within a given space, according to an external or internal order.¹⁹³

This spatial analysis of exorcism then contributes to the study of how human beings religiously interact with space (with whatever is in their environment). That said, the “game” that is exorcism is full of numerous “playable characters” (those observing and participating in the ritual), “non-playable characters” (any number of supernatural entities), and “game mechanics” (props, tools, equipment, intervals of time, etc.). To reiterate Bruno Latour’s actor network theory from Section III, any given space is a network of various objects and places. This tangible material then constitutes a web of dynamic relationships with the individual human body at its center. One’s body gives the self a measure of direction, location, and distance.¹⁹⁴ Considering that this is, in part, a study of the numerous supernatural entities that could use and/or occupy the body for their own purposes, the human body (and all of its segments) is not only a space (another Matriushhka doll) but also a place. It reflects stability and human attachment; it is tangible and relational; it can be bent and warped by its users and occupants; and it is composed of intersections of mobile and fixed elements. Thus, my motivation to include non-human recipients of exorcism in this

¹⁹⁰ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 17, 140.

¹⁹¹ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 161.

¹⁹² Tuan, *Space and Place*, 17.

¹⁹³ By *external* order (which is most often the case), I speak of a cultural system that shapes human activity within a space, a system designed by the dominant user of the space. An *internal* order then refers to a space’s own geometric or physical properties.

¹⁹⁴ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 12, 44-46.

study led me to expand my conception of *what is being exorcised*. Human bodies are then spaces just like anything else.

The model I suggest presents five spatial dimensions of exorcism, each of which engages a particular set of locative concerns:

- (1) the initial dwelling of the intruder (*boundaries, territoriality*);
- (2) the temporary space of the intruder (*intrusion, attachment, connectivity, fluidity, eviction, replacement*);
- (3) the space of the exorcism (*emplacement, reconfiguration*);
- (4) the spaces of the exorcist (*proximity, containment*); and
- (5) the final destination of what is exorcised (*eradication, relocation, captivity*).

Such an analysis oscillates from concrete, physical spaces (the temple, home, public shrines) to the figurative and imagined ones¹⁹⁵ (the “battlefield,” “courtroom,” “housecleaning”). Additionally, other spatial concerns will be discussed as they intersect the dimensions above, including *occupancy, group density, transitional spaces, orientation and placement, (im)mobility, places, defacement, and temporality*.

A. The Initial Space of the Intruder

To begin, among groups, there is a constant competition for space, against predators and/or pests (jinn, pēys, pretas, devtas, dybbuks, etc.).¹⁹⁶ The initial space of the intruder is often a fixed,¹⁹⁷ open, nonempty space. It is typically a space of taboo, more of a *There* than a *Here*.¹⁹⁸ By this, I mean that there is typically an already established proper distance that separates the intruder from the dwelling spaces of its opposing parties. Of course, this initial

¹⁹⁵ For the spatial distinction, see Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 6.

¹⁹⁶ See Pascal Boyer, “Gods and the Mental Instincts that Create Them,” in *Science, Religion, and the Human Experience*, ed. James D. Proctor (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 243.

¹⁹⁷ The fixed/mobile dichotomy is taken from Simmel, *Simmel on Culture*, 146, and Tuan, *Space and Place*, 12, 29.

¹⁹⁸ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 50; Jonathan Z. Smith, “Here, There, and Anywhere,” in *Relating Religion* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 2004).

space of the intruder is still typically open to unsuspecting victims. Joshua Trachtenberg's study of medieval Jewry (1939) mentions that "demons frequented uninhabited places, deserts and forests and fields, as well as unclean places." Yoram Bilu's contemporary work of Moroccan Jews in Israel attests that *jnun* (pl. of *jinn*) are believed to gather in cemeteries, market places, rivers and springs, caves and ruins. "Through the interviews, it became evident that bathrooms and toilets¹⁹⁹ in the recently built *moshavim* [village] houses have been modern substitutes for rivers, springs, and open sewage canals presumably haunted by *jnun* in Morocco." ²⁰⁰

The intruder's initial space can also be a place of junction,²⁰¹ a space where the opposing forces meet.²⁰² For instance, Kapferer's ethnography in Sri Lanka (1983/1991) presents an emic perspective of such locations.

Sinhalese culturally view points of transition in nature, transition in the nature/culture interaction and transition in culture, points and moments of articulation in structure, as weak and vulnerable to disorder. Additionally, disunity in a wider order concentrates and manifests itself at the sensitive and transitional points of articulation. Demons manifest their power at times and places of transition. They strike at moments of passage in the day and night; they dwell at river crossings, at crossroads, at waterfalls and at cemeteries.²⁰³

B. The Temporary Space of the Intruder

One could argue that as the intruder moves into a new temporary space, so does its "party line." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari offer the following explanation for this phenomenon of bordering – centered on a figure they call the *anomalous*, "the Outsider."

¹⁹⁹ For examples of ghosts found in toilets, see Mu-Chou Poo, "The Culture of Ghosts in the Six Dynasties Period," in *Rethinking Ghosts in World Religions*, ed. Mu-Chou Poo (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 251-252.

²⁰⁰ Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2004), viii, 32; Bilu, "Demonic Explanations," 364-365, 370.

²⁰¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 193.

²⁰² See FN 35.

²⁰³ Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 147.

This is our hypothesis: a multiplicity is defined not by the elements that compose it in extension... but by the lines and dimensions it encompasses in “intension.” If you change dimensions, if you add or subtract one, you change multiplicity. Thus there is a borderline for each multiplicity; it is in no way a center but rather the enveloping line or farthest dimension, as a function of which it is possible to count the others [before it], all those lines or dimensions constitute the pack at a given moment (beyond the borderline, the multiplicity changes nature). [...] The elements of the pack are only imaginary “dummies,” the characteristics of the pack are only symbolic entities; all that counts is the borderline.... That the anomalous is the borderline makes it easier for us to understand the various positions it occupies in relation to the pack or the multiplicity it borders.... [T]he pack has a borderline, and an anomalous position, whenever in a given space an animal is on the line or in the act of drawing the line in relation to which all the other members of the pack will fall into one of two halves, left or right: a peripheral position, such that it is impossible to tell if the anomalous is still in the band, already outside the band, or at the shifting boundary of the band.²⁰⁴

The movement of the anomalous has reconfigured the rigidly fixed positions previously in place. Territory is then a prime example of the topological spaces I spoke of in Section I. Shifting borders can either stretch or compress the original space, e.g. warping a circle into an ellipsis. This is one of the ways that supernatural predators and pests can influence a given space.²⁰⁵ For this reason, it is common for religious practitioners to leave special contraptions, designed to either ward off or capture foreign invaders. Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956), for example, tells of a peculiar object used in numerous Tibetan magic rites called *mdos* – a “thread-cross” in the shape of a cob-web.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1987), 245. Cf. Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing*, 55. “[D]iscerning the presence of the demon must be interpreted in the same category as diagnosing the presence of a virus.”

²⁰⁵ See FN 51.

²⁰⁶ Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (Kathmandu: Book Faith India, 1996), 369-370. “The use of thread-crosses in Tibet dates already from pre-Buddhist times.... In certain cases, e.g. in the rites of the weather-makers, they serve as a magic contraption for catching demons; the evil spirits are supposed to get entangled in the antennae of the *mdos* just like a fly in a cob-web. Small *mdos* are placed as a protection against demons above the entrance of a house or on the top of a roof. In Ladakh it is customary to protect a monastery and the surrounding area by huge thread-crosses. After such a *mdos* has been used for some time, the structure is pulled down, broken up, and then

Under this logic of shifting boundaries, spaces are to be viewed as extensions of both their occupants and users.²⁰⁷ Thus, the intruder who advances into enemy territory threatens the perceived homogeneity of the space. Exorcism then serves as the suppression or elimination of unsanctioned differentiation between the occupants and users of a given space.²⁰⁸ A note, however, must be made that this scenario is not fully representative of all exorcism cases. What has been culturally marked as impure or unclean is not always perceived as radically dangerous. For instance, the “foreigner” could be welcomed into the temporary space for ceremonial purposes²⁰⁹ or the exorcist could seek to expand his/her territory, infiltrating a foreign space and displacing its occupants.²¹⁰ In this latter scenario, the “intruders” are now the *proper* occupants, while the real intrusion comes from the exorcist. In either situation, a new user wishes to establish a spatial or institutional localization of power (“the power play”). But regardless, the issues to be studied within the

mostly burned, in order to destroy any evil spirits which had been caught in it. Strangely enough, pieces of such destroyed thread-crosses are on the other hand often preserved by laymen as a protection against all sorts of evil.” For pictures, see *Where the Gods Are Mountains*, trans. Michael Bullock (New York: Reynal, 1956), 144.

²⁰⁷ See Sean McCloud, *American Possessions* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013), 176. There, McCloud details how land defilement is understood to occur through an individual’s sins, including idolatry, bloodshed, immorality, and covenant breaking. Additionally, evil spirits that haunt the land could have also been summoned by the collective violence committed by one group against another through colonization, enslavement, war, or genocide. Such an ideology clearly influences evangelical missionary work. Compare the concept of “defiled land” to Csordas, *The Sacred Self*, 198; Assayag, *At the Confluence of Two Rivers*, 106; and Hsien-huei, “Encountering Evil,” 111.

²⁰⁸ Simmel, *Simmel on Culture*, 141, 160; Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Anchor, 1966), 3, 97.

²⁰⁹ Recall the adoricism debate from Section I (FN 18). Cf. David Knipe, “Night of the Growing Dead,” in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel (Albany: State U of New York, 1989), 123-156, esp. 144.

²¹⁰ McCloud, *American Possessions*, 168. “For Third Wave Evangelicals, spiritual warfare entails fighting real demons who occupy physical spaces – including human bodies, objects, place of residence, tracts of land and even entire cities and countries.”

first and second dimension are the penetrable boundaries and shifting territories; without them, an exorcism would not be necessary.

Spaces are fluid and often collide with each other.²¹¹ But at the heart of territoriality is then the notion of proper spacing.²¹² As spaces begin to commingle, elements are traded, boundaries begin to blur, and in-between zones and discontinuous pockets are introduced.²¹³ This is evident especially when a user/occupant's influence over a space can be determined by time, group density,²¹⁴ transitional points, and other factors. In general, supernatural predators manifest their power at sensitive times and places – as Kapferer notes, at transitional points within the articulation of power and group identity. For instance, Trachtenberg mentions that night time²¹⁵ was understood to be the demon's domain; this extends to darkness in general as demons consorted in the shade of the trees and in shadows cast by the moon. As Kapferer also mentions: "Individuals are likely to be attacked by demons when they are psychologically and/or physically alone." And Bilu notes that "special human roles that entail a shift in the life-cycle, such as pregnant women, new-borns, brides and bridegrooms, and dead men, are haunted by demons."²¹⁶ Yet, despite the fluid

²¹¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 42. See also Ceri Watkins, "Representations of Space, Spatial Practices and Spaces of Representation," *Culture and Organization* 11, no. 3 (2005), 211.

²¹² Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, 7-10.

²¹³ There is much literature on the "in-between-ness" of space: Victor Turner's *liminality*, Homi Bhabha's *hybridity*, and Gloria Anzaldua's *borderlands*, to name a few. See Soja, *Thirdspace*, 83-163, for an introduction.

²¹⁴ Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, 17.

²¹⁵ Beyond this, certain days and months are more or less ominous due to astrological factors. See Assayag, *At the Confluence of Two Rivers*, 106. "On the other hand, the *bhuts* become rare in the months of *Chaitra* (March/April), *Pausha* (December/January) and *Ashvina* (September/October), while *jinns* are inactive in the month of *Ramadan* and during important festivals all through the year."

²¹⁶ Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 46, 34; Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 70; Bilu, "Demonic Explanations," 364-365.

nature of territory, various spaces of influence and spheres of dominance remain. Beni

Gupta's work on Rajasthan (1979) provides an illustrative example.

When questioned the evil spirit, possessing the girl, spoke, "She has passed urine under the banyan tree which is my abode."²¹⁷ It is really a great insult to me. I will not leave her alive."²¹⁸

As mentioned above, a given space typically implies rigidly fixed positions – both geometric and social. For instance, Jackie Assayag's research (2004) – on dargahs in India – notes the exorcistic method of nailing jinn to nearby trees.

One would think that the djinn's ability to do evil depends on its mobility, as opposed to the saint's benevolence, which remains permanently in his shrine. But it must be remembered that fixing does not mean killing! Like Allah Himself, the saint only pushes the powers that refuse to recognize his power to the periphery of his spiritual domain, which in Allah's case extends to the end of the earth.²¹⁹

As Sheldrake puts it: "Power is expressed in the monopolization of central places by socially strong groups and the relegation of weaker groups in society to less desirable environments."²²⁰ Exorcism then refers to either the proper maintenance of these positions

²¹⁷ See Bilu, "Demonic Explanations," 374. Bilu notes inadvertent assault as a common explanation for a person's jinn inflicted disease, e.g. s/he must have been "stepping over a demon on the road." Cf. "Demonic Explanations," 372. "One of these patients was Aliza who learned through the healer that she hit a demon exactly between his eyes."

²¹⁸ Beni Gupta, *Magical Beliefs and Superstitions* (Delhi: Prakashan, 1979), 153.

²¹⁹ Assayag, *At the Confluence of Two Rivers*, 113.

²²⁰ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 21. Relegation of weaker groups to the periphery is not the only way to demonstrate power. Consider this example from Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 190-192. "The first ritual event involves the giving of offerings to the ghosts, usually the ghosts of dead kin, and is performed at all major exorcisms. A specially constructed offering basket is placed on the ground before the front porch of the house. [...] Placing the offering basket on the ground is indicative of the low status of ghosts relative to, for example, demons, whose offerings...are set on chairs conceptualized as offering tables. [...] The exorcist then goes through the house and flames dummala (a powdered tree resin) in order to purify it. Exorcists claim that a purpose of this rite is to draw the ghosts away from the area in which the exorcism is to be performed. If this is not done, there is a risk that they will take the later offerings for the demons. The acceptance of the offerings by the ghost traps them in the basket, renders them subject to human control, and facilitates their removal as agents in the patient's illness." See also FN 110, 258, 304, and 305.

or to their establishment. One thinks of Padmasambhava, the famous Buddhist master, exorcising the spirits native to Tibet, allowing for the construction of the first Buddhist monastery.

The temporary space of the intruder can be a fixed or mobile location. As an example of the former, one of the most important forms of early Chinese archery magic is the ritual shooting of arrows at the sky, the earth, and the four cardinal directions to purge a space of its baleful influences. “The magic was achieved by bows and arrows fashioned of apotropaic wood,” Jeffery Riegel says.²²¹ In regards to the latter (a mobile space), Ed and Lorraine Warren tell of an inhuman spirit that resides in a *Raggedy Ann* doll. Unable to exorcise the spirit, the Warrens had a special case built for “Annabelle” (the doll) inside their “Occult Museum,” where she resides to this day.²²²

Despite these examples, most of the scholarship on exorcism is devoted to the human body as the temporary space of the intruder (as Sections II and III illustrate). Said space can be marked (or used) – in such a way that as the body moves, the mark or influence of the intruder follows – or the space could feature a new occupant (possession). Assayag’s research (2004) features a case that illustrates the former.

As a matter of fact, the only way to get rid of the “evil eye” [curse] is to transfer it to others. How is this done? It is necessary to prepare a *lumbu*, a mixture of red chillies activated by a few *mantras* and scatter it at the intersection of three roads; and the first person to walk over it is supposed to take away the spell.²²³

²²¹ Jeffery Riegel, “Early Chinese Target Magic,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 10 (1982), 1.

²²² Ed & Lorraine Warren, “Annabelle,” accessed June 10, 2018, <http://www.warrens.net/annabelle/>. A Hollywood sensationalized version of the doll has subsequently appeared in three recent horror films: *The Conjuring* (2013), *Annabelle* (2014), and *Annabelle: Creation* (2017).

²²³ Assayag, *At the Confluence of Two Rivers*, 112.

Even when the curse is not transferred, it still needs to be deactivated.²²⁴ For instance, Trachtenberg mentions in his data of European Jewry the prevalent fear of lightning.²²⁵

This almost universal belief in the close relation between demons and storms was expressed in the idea that thunder and lightning are the bolts which the demons, aligned in two hostile camps, discharge against one another during the storm. Certain men are peculiarly susceptible to harm from those bolts, and can be healed only by magic.²²⁶

Similarly, Thomas Csordas and Maureen Trudelle Schwarz have written on Navajo physicians attributing cancer to inappropriate contact with lightning, requiring a specific ritual (Lightning Way) to remove the negative effects.²²⁷

In these cases, the human body often displays either hyper- or hypo-activity as a sign of affliction (e.g. epilepsy and/or catatony). The following examples come from Gedalyah Nigal, who collected and annotated (originally in Hebrew) what appears to be the vast majority of the medieval and early modern cases of *dybbuk* possession.

Once inhabited by a spirit, a stricken person would feel a sense of heaviness in some of the limbs. Parts of the body or all of it would begin to tremble, the face would become

²²⁴ See Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 45-49, for reports of countersorcery.

²²⁵ See also *Atharva Veda* I, 12 ("Prayer to Lightning, conceived as the cause of fever, headache, and cough") in Bloomfield, *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*, 7.

²²⁶ Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 34.

²²⁷ See Maureen Trudelle Schwarz, "Lightning Followed Me," in *Religion and Healing in Native America*, 21. Schwarz provides the following interview with a former cancer patient. "They told me that lightning and cancer go together. That if the lightning bothers you that is where the cancer comes from. So I prayed, and I remember when I was a little girl, we were herding sheep and the lightning went right in between me and my uncle, and struck the tree in front of us, and we go [leans backward quickly] – pass out. So I said, 'I know that is where I first got into contact with lightning.'" Cf. "Lightning Followed Me," 34. "But ever since then lightning kind of like follows me around. And when I was in high school, I would be watching my brothers. We used to live at Continental Divide and it rained a lot up there and it never failed, the lightning would always strike the pole beside our house all the time. And when I was pregnant with my son, I was working at Gallup Medical Center and the lightning struck the building I was in. So that lightning has always followed me. But ever since I had that Lightning Way done, I haven't had any problems! So I guess I should have had it done maybe earlier. But yeah, I had a Lightning Way done." For more, see Thomas J. Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity* (Berkeley: U of California, 1997).

contorted, and the eyes would assume a glazed look. [...] A woman possessed by a spirit was struck with fits of epilepsy and mumbled “incoherent sentences.” Yet another woman, in Safed, “lay down like a lifeless stone.”²²⁸

Exorcism can then serve as a restoration of proper movement in space.

When the newly occupied space is a human body, it serves as a complex dimension to be studied. The focal points of this space are often entrances, exits, catacomb-like compartments, and/or places of pain. The culturally understood entryways allow the intruder to gain *access* into the space.²²⁹ Across cultures, the hair and the mouth seem to be most frequent. For example, the Daoist ritual and narrative texts of the Song (12 - 14th century) include rites that specify that if the afflicted person is too weak or emaciated, and cannot endure the ordeal of the exorcistic interrogation (which was physically demanding), a surrogate could take their place. The exorcist then orders the invading spirit to transfer itself to the surrogate via inhaling the afflicted's breath.²³⁰ In the South Asian context (illustrated here by Nabokov), the language describing possession is that a person is “caught” by an evil spirit. “And so the demon is able to ‘catch’ his girl, and according to my consultants, he does so by ‘sitting’ on her head, the locus of sanity, driving her half-crazy before ‘entering’ her body through a lock of hair.” Cases of non-human spaces can also feature these entry points. “A *mezuzah* placed at the entrance of a house had the power of preventing the entry of a spirit,” Nigal notes. “Asked how he succeeded in entering a house that did have a

²²⁸ Gedalyah Nigal, *Magic, Mysticism, and Hasidism* (Northvale: Aronson, 1994), 76; for the original source in Hebrew, see Gedalyah Nigal, “The Role of the Dybbuk in Jewish Mysticism,” *Daat*, no. 4 (1980).

²²⁹ Csordas, *The Sacred Self*, 227. “Instead of transgressing body boundaries, the spirit is described as latching on, hooking on or into, hanging on, grabbing, or grafting onto a person at the site of an emotional wound metaphorically understood as a kind of hole in the self.”

²³⁰ Boltz, “Taoist Rites of Exorcism,” 130.

mezuzah, the spirit replied that he was able to do so through the lower entrance, on which there was no *mezuzah*.”²³¹

Once inside the space, the intruder is still mobile as the body becomes compartmentalized. Stan Royal Mumford’s ethnography of Nepal (1989) illustrates such a phenomenon. “Several persons rushed to her, pressing on these points with great force to prevent the demonic spirits from rising to her head, the girl cooperating by saying, ‘It’s here, no, now it’s there, press there!’”²³² We see that the intruder’s movement is then fluid, utilizing the connectivity of space, which implies less room for the original inhabitant. Nigal’s data attests to the same. “Speaking to an exorcist, a spirit exclaims: ‘Now I am about to hide myself in one of the limbs where I am unable to hear the imprecations which your honor heaps upon me!’” The exorcism then intensifies²³³ due to the intruder’s newly found attachment or connection to the space²³⁴ or due to the difficulty of locating its deep or secret hiding spot. Gupta tells of a spell that advises exorcists to “walk with terrible steps as if to open the strong doors made of Vajra or iron,” after which the disease caused by a ghost, demon, or spirit should be removed.²³⁵

²³¹ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 74; Nigal, *Magic, Mysticism, and Hasidism*, 87-88.

²³² Stan Royal Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue* (Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1989), 197.

²³³ Exorcisms typically progress towards a ritual climax, as mentioned in Section I.

²³⁴ Csordas, *The Sacred Self*, 227. “Demonic affliction is thus described in the language of ‘bondage’ to evil spirits, and through deliverance a patient is ‘released’ from that bondage.” Cf. Franck Rollier, “Walking Round on the Straight Path in the Name of the Father,” in *Managing Distress*, ed. Marine Carrin (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 58. “The demon repeats: ‘how can I escape, I’ve been in his body for 18 years, I’m not disturbing him at all, why do you want to take me prisoner? You can punish me as much as you like, but I will never go away.’”

²³⁵ Nigal, *Magic, Mysticism, and Hasidism*, 78-79; Gupta, *Magical Beliefs and Superstitions*, 158.

Just as the intruder's entrance was a focal point of this space, so too is its exit – which is also commonly the hair or mouth. As Nigal observes:

Having abandoned the patient's body, a spirit settled in his hair, which thereupon the hair stiffened "like iron needles." The exorcist proceeded to shave off the patient's hair, as a result of which the spirit departed from the patient.²³⁶

After a short liturgy, Erica Shepherd, "The Lady Exorcist" of Miami, Florida²³⁷ arms her church members with paper towels as they await their shepherd's command to commence the collective purge.²³⁸ "Go! Go! Go!" she yells. As the entire congregation begins to burp, cough, and gag, everything from drool to mucus to vomit is expelled during these weekly spiritual house-clearings.²³⁹ The same practice is also utilized by Pastor John Goguen, founder of the Agape Bible Fellowship, in East Aurora, New York. Goguen explains that demons enter the body through our breath and that people should monitor how often they incessantly yawn or burp.²⁴⁰ Additionally, sometimes a new occupant (one closely

²³⁶ Nigal notes that the typical exit points in the *dybbuk* literature are the small toe of the left foot, the little finger of the right hand, the genitalia, the anus, etc. See Nigal, *Magic, Mysticism, and Hasidism*, 116, 125-126. The administration of sulfurous fumes to the patient's nose then served twin purposes: "to open the spirit's mouth that it might disclose its name and other personal particulars and to effect its exit from the patient's body."

²³⁷ "African American, Lady Exorcist, Erica Shepherd," Christian Newswire, accessed June 10, 2018, <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/92646991.html>.

²³⁸ Csordas, *The Sacred Self*, 174. "In the 1970s it was reported that spirits might exit or be expelled from their host in the form of screeching, coughing, spitting, a movement in the belly as if a fetus were kicking around, writhing on the floor, a 'snake' coming out of the person's mouth, excretion of feces, or vomiting—one healer recalled that in those days their team never performed deliverance without a bucket available for vomit."

²³⁹ For video of the event, see Penn & Teller, *Penn & Teller: Bullshit!*, "Exorcism," Season 5, Episode 5, aired April 19, 2007, on Showtime.

²⁴⁰ Wonbo Woo and Lauren Effron, "Casting Out Demons," *ABC News*, July 15, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/casting-demons-expelling-demons-mucus-saliva-ny-church/story?id=14075667>.

associated with the group) is explicitly invited to take the place of the intruder (replacement), though the entry point is not always made explicit.²⁴¹

The exorcist's use of tools provides further insight into this spatial dimension. Any exorcistic device (objects, substances, images, sounds, utterances, etc.) implies not only an *agent of change* (the exorcist) responsible for the proper and effective use of the tool but also its orientation relative to the *object of change* (the space to be exorcised).²⁴² This reveals that certain areas of the space have been in some way highlighted with significance, if they are to be oriented around. Often these focal points are places of pain. And yet perhaps the most common area of focus is the head, regardless of the specific ailment. Gupta tells of a Bhopa who once performed exorcism for nine patients.

Two of them were suffering from fever and five from hysteria and two from colic pain. First of all he called the spirits of the demons in the body of the patients and started whirling his head violently. Then he ordered each demon to leave his patient and waved a peacock feather broom 21 times over the head of the latter while pronouncing some spell. As a result, the patients ceased shaking and became normal, and the Bhopa assured them that the demon had left and that they were completely cured.²⁴³

Additionally, the tool – some environmental or human-made object,²⁴⁴ though it could also include the user's anatomical equipment (hands, feet, digits, tongue, and so on)²⁴⁵ – is

²⁴¹ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 96. “Now the exorcism was completely over. Replaced by the goddess, the demon was banished for good.” For the baptism/exorcism recipient being filled with the Holy Spirit, see Dayna S. Kalleres, *City of Demons* (Berkeley: U of California, 2015), 162.

²⁴² See Robert W. Shumaker et al., *Animal Tool Behavior* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011), 7. The object of change becomes ambiguous from a cross-cultural perspective. It could denote the unwanted presence of the supernatural predator or pest or just the affliction but it could also denote the temporary space of the intruder (the body, house, etc.). This incongruity regarding the recipient of exorcism is another feature of the polythetic taxonomy I have constructed. Recall the field manual in Section I.

²⁴³ Gupta, *Magical Beliefs and Superstitions*, 152.

²⁴⁴ Apotropaeum is another feature of the concluding polythetic model. See Donald Harper, “A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B.C.,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45, no. 2 (1985), 495. There, Harper notes that the *Pai tse t'u* manuscript instructs its

used to alter more efficiently the form, position, or condition of given space; and often, the manipulation of the tool involves movement.²⁴⁶ The internal and/or external employment²⁴⁷ of the tools also reveals the compartments of the intruder's temporary space. Mu-Chou Poo (2000) references an early Chinese narrative text where a man is advised to "take the excrement of five kinds of animal and bathe in it." He also notes that in another version the man bathed in orchid soup.²⁴⁸ Similarly, in 1997, a 5-year-old Bronx girl died after being

readers to throw a shoe at an unwelcomed demon and that the *Shui-hu-ti* demonography entries suggest throwing white stones. Compare this to Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 136. "The Talmud, for instance, remarks that Abraham possessed a gem which could heal all those who looked upon it." Human-made devices also vary wildly, but the most common are amulets, talismans, and other demonifuge involving script and/or diagrams.

²⁴⁵ For a discussion of the Pentecostal tradition of "laying on of hands," see Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing*, 30. Cf. Gupta, *Magical Beliefs and Superstitions*, 169. "If a man is suffering from pain or strain in his back the magical device employed to relieve him is that a man who has been delivered in an invert position touches the painful region of the patient early in the morning without speaking a word to anybody. The patient also should not speak any word. It is believed that the patient feels at once relieved from pain after being touched by the foot of such a man though he does not know any spell. He does not utter any formula and does not practice any ritual. This popular rite is very common in Rajasthan."

²⁴⁶ Consider Brett Hendrickson, *Border Medicine* (New York: New York U, 2014), 77, 174, 200. Hendrickson details a well-known practice of cleansing or "sweeping" the body (*limpia*) with a bundle of herbs or feathers, an egg, branch, or crucifix to remove the negative energies from one's person – typically moving from the crown of the head to the feet. Compare this to Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1984), 48. Obeyesekere comments on the practice of *sirasapada* ("head-to-feet verse") constantly sung in Pattini rituals. "The purpose of the *sirasapada* is to magically banish the *dōsa* [misfortune, trouble] that lurks in the various parts of the human body from the head down to the feet." See *Atharva Veda* II, 32 ("Charm to secure perfect health") in Bloomfield, *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*, 44-45. "It is clear," says Obeyesekere, "that the tradition of *sirasapada* goes back at least to the Vedic period, though we have no information regarding its diffusion to Sri Lanka. The Vedic literature has several references to the *sirasapada* type of cures."

²⁴⁷ Shumaker et al., *Animal Tool Behavior*, 4-5, 8. I mentioned earlier that a goal of my work is to move towards the study of exorcism's ritual mechanics. Along these lines, currently, I am also developing a much larger research question: given the dynamics of territoriality, tool use, and predator/prey/pest mentality prevalent in exorcism, is there an observable connection between human and animal behavior?

²⁴⁸ Poo, "Ghost Literature," 48.

forced by her grandmother and mother to swallow a mixture of ammonia, vinegar, cayenne pepper, and olive oil in an effort to exorcise the demons from her body. The temper tantrum prone child's mouth was then taped shut to ensure her intake of the lethal cocktail.²⁴⁹

C. The Space of the Exorcism

If mobile (like a body), the temporary space of the intruder is often then transported to a more preferred location, typically a sacred place,²⁵⁰ a *There* – a space that has already been marked with the specific character of the group,²⁵¹ already embedded with a history and identity that implies intimacy.²⁵² Similar to the case of “Mr. G.R.” from Section II, Peter Gottschalk, looking at the Hindu/Muslim dialogue in India (2003), presents us with the following case.

Any Muslim who is not buried after death can seize a Hindu (for example, someone going to the toilet). They can cause the person to go nude, be crazy, or act like a Muslim.... These people can come to Śāstrī Brahm's temple and be judged [diagnosed], but they are then sent to the places said to control *jinn* because there is no system to control *jinn* in this temple. So they are sent to a Muslim saint's tomb where there is *jinn* control, or the Muslim ghost is asked what it wants since it's possible that the *jinn* will take that and abandon the person.²⁵³

These spaces (e.g. Śāstrī Brahm's temple, Mira Datar Dargah, and the like) exist under the influence of a particular set of socio-religious practices, often with established names,

²⁴⁹ Beth Gardiner, “Mother, Grandmother Charged After Police Find Girl Poisoned,” *The Seattle Times*. May 19, 1997.

<http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=19970519&slug=2540067>.

²⁵⁰ Sax, *God of Justice*, 53. “Of course, many different kinds of places are important in the lives of individual persons, but when a particular place is singled out in ritual – a mosque or church, a sacred site, a memorial, a place of heroic sacrifice – then it achieves a heightened importance.”

²⁵¹ Cf. Gupta, *Magical Beliefs and Superstitions*, 200. During Navaratra, Gupta notes, “women possessed by witches are taken to the temple or platform of Bhairav or some goddess where not only witches but ghosts and other female demons are cast out.”

²⁵² Tuan, *Space and Place*, 33, 73, 136; Augé, *Non-places*, 77-78.

²⁵³ Peter Gottschalk, “Dead Healers and Living Identities,” in *The Living and the Dead*, ed. Liz Wilson (Albany: State U of New York, 2003), 179.

narratives, rituals, and so forth.²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, this consecrated space can still be reconsecrated before the exorcism takes place – just as a profane space would be, if necessary.²⁵⁵ The dynamic to be studied is then how the recipient of the exorcism functions within these larger domains (spaces within spaces like the Matriushka doll). Typically, there are fixed *pivots* marked with a sacred identity that dominate (and warp) the space. Movement and activity are then oriented around said pivots.²⁵⁶

For instance, a mere glance at the statue of Hanuman at Sarangpur is said to be sufficient in driving out spirits from the possessed.²⁵⁷ Additionally, water blessed in front of the statue's gaze (while chanting) is said to be very powerful. Sandalwood powder (seen by the statue) ritually applied to one's body is also said cleanse the self of afflictions. A 30-minute Hindi promotional video shows an exorcist (Shri Anil Maharaj) ritually directing a possessed woman to look at the statue – to “feel its vibrations.”²⁵⁸ Similar to this, in 2008, a former priest in Romania began a seven-year jail term for murdering a young nun during an exorcism ritual where she was bound, chained to a cross, and denied food and water for days.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ Augé, *Non-places*, 16-17; Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 1, 6, 17.

²⁵⁵ Sax discusses the *kas puja* ritual in India, which is utilized to drive away negative energies and purify the area where the devta shrines (*than*) are to be constructed. See Sax, *God of Justice*, 66

²⁵⁶ See William F. Hanks, “Exorcism and the Description of Participant Roles,” in *Natural Histories of Discourse*, eds. Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (Chicago: U of Chicago, 2010), 180. Hanks refers to these pivots as “centered subspaces,” used as reference points to locate other objects – as signified through language (“*near, far, right, left, front, back, above, and below*”).

²⁵⁷ R.E. Enthoven, *The Folklore of Bombay* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2001), 191.

²⁵⁸ “MAHARAJA SARANGPUR KE”, YouTube. Jitesh Ganatra, Nov. 10, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoHQWktDWY8>.

²⁵⁹ “Former Priest Jailed Over Exorcism Death,” *FOX News*, Associated Press, Jan. 31, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,327005,00.html>. Exorcism recipients are also

These examples illustrate the web of dynamic relationships mentioned in Section III – particularly how these dynamics are carried out in space. During the Sarangpur exorcism, all participants (including the spectators) sit on the ground beneath the statue’s gaze. Hanuman’s sacred identity then commands most of the movement and activity around him as a pivot. The exorcist and the patient also serve as additional pivots during this time – for both each other and the audience.²⁶⁰ The cross is then a pivot in the second, more extreme, example. The fact that the distance has been closed between the two pivots (icon and victim) is also significant. Spatial power is often dependent on proximity.²⁶¹

The denial of movement is also a demonstration of power. Bilu (1985) notes that in the public settings of exorcism (according to the early *dybbuk* literature), sometimes the victim was tied and laid down in front of the ark containing the Torah scrolls.²⁶² As all of these cases reveal, the movement of the afflicted is often physically restricted. Although we must not forget the dancing victims of tarantism in Southern Italy, said phenomenon represents an

chained amidst the *dargah* worship documented in Pfleiderer, “Mira Datar Dargah,” 222, and Assayag, *At the Confluence of Two Rivers*, 99.

²⁶⁰ Hanks, “Exorcism and the Description of Participant Roles,” 185-186. “The spatial arrangement of participants is invariable: the beneficiary faces the altar in front of him, from behind the altar. The shaman stands or sits behind and to the side of the beneficiary, and any spectators remain behind the shaman. [...] The orientation of the icons is the inverse of that of the altar as a whole, since they face the participants directly.” Cf. “Exorcism and the Description of Participant Roles,” 179-180. “[T]he shaman cannot sit while the patient stands, nor can either face away from the altar, nor can the shaman speak as if earth spirits were sky spirits, or evil were above good in space, nor could spirits be introduced into beneficiary’s body from top-to-bottom rather than bottom-to-top, nor is it conceivable that an icon be placed beneath the altar or off to the side, or facing away from the performers, and so on.”

²⁶¹ See FN 65.

²⁶² Bilu, “The Taming of the Deviants and Beyond,” 56-57. The rabbi’s performance was accompanied by an orchestrated set of activities performed by the audience. These included the taking out of the Torah scrolls from the ark, the blowing of the ritual ram’s horn (*shofar*), and the successive lighting and extinguishing of black candles. I move that we start viewing this type of ritual activity as episodic play. Recall the field manual in Section I.

exception, as most exorcism recipients (particularly the human receptacles) must strictly adhere to the larger space's sacred structure.

As Gottschalk reports:

Many of the devotees suffering possession [in the village of Arampur, India] rely on the powers of exorcism practiced by professional Brahman men who work at the temple [of Śāstrī Brahm].... [T]he exorcist positions the client, surrounded by the family members and friends who brought him or her, in the courtyard facing Śāstrī Brahm's *mūrti* [embodiment]. This proximity with the *mūrti* may cause the possessing spirit to induce its host to tremble, shake, gyrate, weep, sing, and/or shout. The exorcist attempts to speak with the spirit, often physically provoking its attention by prodding the host with a short stick. "*Bhūt bole!*" (Speak ghost!), the exorcist commands, "Who are you? What do you want?" He warns the ghost that it is in the *darbār* (royal court) of Śāstrī Brahm. When the exorcist thinks that she or he understands the nature of the possessing spirit and what needs to be done to extricate it from the client, she or he will command it to say and accept that Śāstrī Brahm is *mālik* ("lord"). When the spirit finally affirms this (it may take awhile if it resists), the Brahman leads the victim to the *mūrti* and to the sacrificial fire pit so that the proper offerings can be made.²⁶³

Thus, in this example, we see the programmatic type of exorcism rituals (that Nabokov spoke of) being acted out in space.²⁶⁴ In contrast, the tarantati (mentioned in Section I) have folded the space around them, designating themselves as a new pivot²⁶⁵ – with more freedom (space) of expression.

Other examples show practitioners restructuring various public spaces for their ritual purposes. For instance, in 2003, 8-year-old Terrance Cottrell Jr. was suffocated in a Milwaukee strip mall, where members of the Faith Temple Church of the Apostolic Faith prayed that God would deliver him from the evil spirits they believed were the source of his

²⁶³ Gottschalk, "Dead Healers and Living Identities," 182.

²⁶⁴ Obeyesekere, "Psychocultural Exegesis," 264. "The *Kapurāla* takes her by the hair into the shrine, takes her up to the altar of each deity still holding her by the hair, and forces her head down on the altars, paying obeisance to the deities. Then he takes her outside to the *bō* tree and makes her pay obeisance to the tree (i.e., the Buddha)."

²⁶⁵ See Kevin Hetherington, "Museum Topology and the Will to Connect," *Journal of Material Culture* 2, no. 2 (1997), 200, 214, 216.

autism.²⁶⁶ Similarly, a man in Austin, Texas, recorded a video on his phone of an exorcism taking place outside a Starbucks (2014),²⁶⁷ while Nick Chester's article online notes: "I Went to an Islamic Exorcism in the Back of a Glaswegian Nail Salon" (2015).²⁶⁸

D. The Spaces of the Exorcist

As these previous examples reveal, the spaces of the exorcist vary, but are perhaps just as complex as the space of the recipient. First and foremost, the exorcist creates²⁶⁹ and commands (orchestrates)²⁷⁰ the larger space of the exorcism. William Hanks' work (1996) on contemporary Maya society in Mexico illustrates as much.

In the course of ritual performance, a Maya shaman transforms his patient's reality by creating a universal space around himself and the altar at which he performs. This practice is a major source of shamanic power, involving the use of specialized knowledge and the systematic reconstitution of lived space. It rests on a special way of combining the perspectively oriented fields of the human body (of shaman and beneficiaries), the altar with its icons, the reference space projected by the verbal discourse, and the absolute space of cardinal locations and cosmological dimensions.²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ Jeff Flock, "Autistic boy's death at church ruled homicide," *CNN*, Aug. 26, 2003, <http://www.cnn.com/2003/LAW/08/25/autistic.boy.death/>. See also John Haderlein, dir., *Junior: The Terrance Cottrell Story*, Aug. 30, 2006, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1541837/>.

²⁶⁷ Ed Mazza, "Starbucks Exorcism Caught On Video In Austin, Texas," *Huffington Post*, Nov. 14, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/13/starbucks-exorcism_n_6156076.html.

²⁶⁸ Nick Chester, "I Went to an Islamic Exorcism in the Back of a Glaswegian Nail Salon," *VICE*, March 1, 2015, http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/i-went-to-an-islamic-exorcism-in-the-back-of-a-glaswegian-nail-salon-293.

²⁶⁹ Nabokov notes the factors that contribute to the success of countersorcery. See Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 55. In one case, the cami, Nagaji, "waited for the midnight hour [as] the air of expectation only intensified. That was when the original spells were cast, he once told me. Since Nagaji considered each ritual a counterattack on an opposing sorcerer, he had to strike back at the same time and in like manner."

²⁷⁰ Boltz, "Taoist Rites of Exorcism," 120-121. In the Daoist exorcism rite *Rites of the Five Dippers for Flogging Specters*, the afflicted lies facedown as three thorny branches are placed across his back and both his legs. Once the afflicted is in position, the Daoist Master yells: "Spirit-generals, strike!"

²⁷¹ Hanks, "Exorcism and the Description of Participant Roles," 160.

As the ritual takes place (emplacement),²⁷² the exorcist then directs the attention of the participants involved and the audience observing, altering their relationships to the larger space.²⁷³ Kapferer has made note of this.

Exorcists contribute in their ritual action to the separation of the patient's context from those of the audience. Thus, they tend to cluster tightly around the patient, obscuring the view of the audience. While not engaged in the ritual action, they will converse with members of the patient's household and others in the ritual gathering. They mediate between the understood world of the patient, which they are constructing, and the everyday contexts around them, in which they also actively participate. Occasionally they will explain publicly before the audience what they are about to do.²⁷⁴

Kapferer also notes that the Sinhalese exorcisms he witnessed had appropriate locations and timings in the structural progression of the ritual, signaled through the media of music, song, and dance.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, it is through these cues that "the demonic as a finite province of meaning, a reality apart from the everyday world, is progressively established around the patient." ²⁷⁶

The ritual could even serve as the creation of a new sacred or taboo space (consecration versus defacement),²⁷⁷ with a name, narrative, history, and identity. For instance, for Halloween in 2015, the cable network "Destination America" aired a live exorcism on the house in St. Louis that was associated with the well-known exorcism of "Roland Doe" in 1949.²⁷⁸ Distance (more accurately, proximity)²⁷⁹ is then the main issue to be studied within

²⁷² Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1982), 104. See also *To Take Place* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1992), 54-55.

²⁷³ See FN 65, 179.

²⁷⁴ Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 253.

²⁷⁵ See also Rouget, *Music and Trance*.

²⁷⁶ Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, 181, 15.

²⁷⁷ See Michael T. Taussig, *Defacement* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999), 1-13, 41-55. It is also productive to view various exorcism recipients (human and non-human alike) as defaced spaces.

²⁷⁸ "Statement Regarding Purported 'Live' Exorcism in St. Louis." Archdiocese of St. Louis, Oct. 29, 2015, <http://archstl.org/node/4385255>.

this dimension. For instance, in May 2015, the former Archbishop of Guadalajara, Cardinal Juan Sandoval Iñiguez, the Archbishop of San Luis Potosi, Carlos Cabrero, as well as several exorcist priests from various Mexican dioceses held a closed-door exorcism ritual at the Metropolitan Cathedral of San Luis Potosí. Cardinal Iñiguez said that the Great Exorcism (*Magno Exorcismo*) “is a prayer to God to drive away the enemy, and keep him from these places—San Luis first, and then all of Mexico.”²⁸⁰ But while this ritually created space may seem bound to physical properties, the ability to manipulate or mark a given space comes without the necessity of inhabiting it.²⁸¹ The space merely needs to be accessible enough that it concerns its potential users. The exorcist then operates typically within the range of his/her influence – close enough to be heard or seen, for instance.²⁸² In fact, some exorcists have even tried to incorporate technological advances.

²⁷⁹ Simmel, *Simmel on Culture*, 141. See also Marko Škorić et al., “‘Excursus on the Stranger’ in the Context of Simmel’s Sociology of Space,” *Sociología*, Vol. 45, No. 6 (2013), 592.

²⁸⁰ Thomas D. Williams, “Bishops Perform ‘Great Exorcism’ on Entire Mexican Nation,” *Breitbart*. June 16, 2015, <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/06/16/bishops-perform-great-exorcism-on-entire-mexican-nation/>.

²⁸¹ Csordas, *The Sacred Self*, 198. “As there is no clear distinction between the spiritual and physical aspect of persons, neither is there an absolute distinction between the spiritual and material presence of evil spirits.”

²⁸² This notion of using sound as an exorcistic device is also found in many Daoist practices. The following comes from Judith Boltz, “Not by the Seal of Office Alone,” in *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, eds. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: U of Hawaii, 1993), 283. “On closer examination the manuals on Thunder Rites yields hints of weapons of far greater potency than incendiary devices had to offer. The evidence rests in not what the talismans depict but in what they were heard to deliver. Talismans of the fire-rhinoceros, crackling fire, and thunder-fire all gave way to claps of thunder. And within those rumblings is the key to a new form of weaponry behind Thunder Rites. Thunder Rites, in effect, gave definition to the long-held perception that the greatest weapon of exorcism was command of the loudest noise.” Harper, in his research (pre-Song), also notes that screeching, drum beating, and bell ringing were also effective against demons. See Harper, “A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B.C.,” 495-496. See also FN 179.

Florida exorcist Chris Ward tells of a “phone deliverance” on a calling patient

(“Spencer”), arranged and taped by the Learning Channel.

Spencer and I attempted to do the phone deliverance and it was a disaster technically. I couldn’t hear Spencer and at times Spencer couldn’t hear me. The crews kept losing the phone connection and the eavesdropping hindered the sound quality. The devil was having a field day. About this time I was wondering how I ever got talked into this situation. It was a miracle that Spencer called me later after the show to tell me, that in spite of all the problems, the phone deliverance worked. He was set free.²⁸³

Similarly, in late 2009, a story began to circulate of a man from Brazil claiming to have a *dybbuk* inside him. Individuals on the man’s behalf were recommended to seek the help of Rav Dovid Batzri, the renowned *mekubal* (kabbalist) mystic in Israel. Unable to travel, Rav Batzri’s assistants arranged for him to be in video contact with the Brazilian man via Skype,²⁸⁴ and in that way Rav Batzri attempted to exorcise the man from his *dybbuk* afflictions. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful according to those involved.²⁸⁵

Despite these examples, the application of the exorcist’s enchanted tools implies an unspoken physical proximity to the space of the recipient and its focal points. Accordingly, physical contact is a common method associated with exorcisms. During the ritual the exorcist also becomes a temporary user of the given space. Extreme examples include the victims of sexual assault. For instance, Toni Stowers-Moore raped her 15-year-old grandson in Durham, North Carolina, so as to remove the “sexual demon” that ailed him (2010).²⁸⁶ In

²⁸³ Chris Ward, *Case Files of an Internet Exorcist* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2005), 74.

²⁸⁴ For more on Skype exorcism, see Jessica Williams, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, “The Exorcist - Skype Edition,” Oct. 13, 2014, <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/pfgsc0/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-the-exorcist---skype-edition>.

²⁸⁵ “Video: Rav Batzri Attempts Dybbuk Removal Via DybbukVision.” *Matzav.com Israel*, Dec. 24, 2009, <http://matzav.com/video-rav-batzri-attempts-dybbuk-removal-via-dybbukvision%C2%AE>.

²⁸⁶ “Prosecutor: Former teacher had sex with grandson,” *ABC11 News*, Sept. 21, 2010, <http://abclocal.go.com/wtvd/story?section=news/local&id=7680629>.

2005, Leonard Ray Owen, a pastor and self-proclaimed prophet in Texas, was arrested for raping a church member also during an exorcism. Detective R.M. Welch began investigating Owens after the victim, a 22-year-old woman, reported that the pastor had raped her on two different occasions at his Fort Worth home. “He said she had a sex demon and a lesbian demon inside of her that needed to come out,” Welch said.²⁸⁷ Finally, in late 2010, Father Thomas Euteneuer, former president of Human Life International, an anti-abortion ministry, was sued for molesting a female patient in the name of exorcism on various occasions for more than two-years. According to the lawsuit in Arlington County Circuit Court, Euteneuer’s sessions with the woman frequently involved inappropriate touching and directing her to undress. She also says that Euteneuer explained passionate kisses as “blowing the Holy Spirit” into her.²⁸⁸

But even in cases without sexual contact, the issue to be highlighted is still proximity.²⁸⁹ Thus, there is often a ritual space shared between the exorcist and the recipient (exorcism’s “field of play”), which also includes fixed objects and locations housing the intruder. Liao Hsien-huei (2007) shares a story of a Chinese prefectural student (in 1133) who quickly pacified the demonic beings that confronted him in the dormitory. The apotropaic weapon was then the Buddhist incantation that he had learned from his brother. “Soon after he

²⁸⁷ “Pastor Accused of Bizarre Rapes,” *Heartland Values* (blog), accessed May 16, 2013, <http://heartlandvalues.blogspot.com/2005/11/pastor-accused-of-bizarre-rapes.html> (site discontinued). See also, “Pastor indicted on rape under guise of exorcism,” *Religion News* (blog), August 31, 2006, <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/15778/pastor-indicted-on-rape-under-guise-of-exorcism>.

²⁸⁸ “Va. Woman Claims Exorcism Turned to Sexual Abuse,” *NBC Washington 4*, Associated Press, June 27, 2012, <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/Va-Woman-Claims-Exorcism-Turned-to-Sexual-Abuse-160529975.html>. Additionally, Wayne Marlon Jones is a recent example from a Scarborough church in Canada (2015). See Jenny Yuen, “Woman sexually assaulted during exorcisms: Cops,” *Toronto Sun*, Feb. 4, 2015, <http://www.torontosun.com/2015/02/04/woman-sexually-assaulted-during-exorcisms-cops>.

²⁸⁹ See FN 65.

transcribed the incantation onto a sheet of paper and pasted it up in the allegedly haunted room, the evildoer was cast out, and the anomalous phenomena disappeared.”²⁹⁰

Additional dynamics at work within this dimension are the consecration of the exorcist’s body prior to the ritual and, much like the recipient, the exorcist’s function (and movement)²⁹¹ within the larger space. In regards to the former, the exorcist’s body, which during the ritual is often a site for the intruder’s attention, can be preemptively closed from the intruder’s influence should it wish to relocate.²⁹² The same can also be done to other participants and observers.²⁹³ Thus, this dimension also engages the issue of containment.²⁹⁴

As an example of the exorcist’s function within the space of the exorcism, we could look to the Great Expulsion ceremony (Later Han) performed at Chinese New Year. At the end of the ceremony, the exorcist and the ceremonial dancers drove the noxious creatures out of the

²⁹⁰ Hsien-huei, “Encountering Evil,” 124-125.

²⁹¹ Jeanne Favret-Saada, “Unbewitching as Therapy,” trans. Catherine Cullen, *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 1. (Feb., 1989), 45-46. “At various places during this visit, spectacular incidents temporarily interrupt the round: the unbewitcher staggers or collapses, he seems to be receiving violent blows from invisible enemies. As he measures their ‘force’ through his own body, he doubles over, stands up again and, in a tense voice, comments on his state: ‘Ha! He’s a bad one, he is! I don’t know if I’m gonna get him [the witch]!’”

²⁹² The following is from Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 168. “Like manuals of orthodox exorcism, the books of necromancy insist on ascetic preparation and ritual purity (if not moral integrity) as prerequisites for commanding the demons. The experiments call upon the necromancer to fast, to be bathed and shaven, to be dressed in white, and so forth. The conjurer is sometimes instructed to abstain from sexual contact for a certain number of days before performing an experiment; although orthodox exorcists were supposed to be celibate clerics, committed to permanent rather than temporary chastity, late medieval books of exorcism sometimes impose precisely the same restriction.”

²⁹³ For a case study of a patient afflicted by a spirit previously banished from another person, see Obeyesekere, “Psychocultural Exegesis,” 250-251.

²⁹⁴ Csordas, *The Sacred Self*, 175. “Some say that binding also weakens the spirits by preventing them, if more than one is present, from communicating with each other or calling on support from other demons hovering in the vicinity.” Cf. Assayag, *At the Confluence of Two Rivers*, 116. “During exorcism the *ghadi* [exorcist] draws a circle around the possessed person. This ring of protection prevents other demons from coming in to give a helping hand to the one under attack.”

palace with exorcistic screaming and torches.²⁹⁵ But for a more extensive example, we turn to Jeanne Favret-Saada's work on the phenomenon of "unbewitching" in northwest France (1989).

The first step is to embark on a meticulous visit around the farm, that is to say the house, room by room, then the farm buildings, stables, pigstyes, henhouses and sheds, with special attention given to thresholds and openings; followed by a walk around the fields; then, the animals are examined, one by one, as well as the farm machinery, the car. [...] The driving principle is "everything must be clenched," and thus a generalized state of enclosure is sought. Witchcraft thinking considers the bewitched farm and the family exploiting it as a single surface, exposed to breaking in by the witches. In order to protect this surface, two kinds of barriers must be put up – the first, to prevent material access, consists of ordinary, visible barriers, closed fences and locked doors; the second, to oppose the "force," consists of invisible or hidden magical barriers, blessed medals, salt and water. [...] For the elements that are naturally difficult to "clench," for example, the fields and the grazing animals, isolation plans (one "goes around" the areas throwing blessed salt) will be combined with sealing plans (filling openings with magical ingredients).²⁹⁶

E. The Final Destination

Few traditions allow the intruder to stay in its new location; and even when the intruder is allowed to stay, typically the sphere of its influence is modified.²⁹⁷ Displacement²⁹⁸ is then the ultimate goal of most exorcisms – the will to disconnect,²⁹⁹ as Sax demonstrates.

²⁹⁵ Harper, "Wu Shih Erh Ping Fang," 74. Cf. Mark E. Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: State U of New York Pr., 1990), 314n115. "In the Eastern Han exorcism, not only did the exorcist and his assistants wield spears and shields, but after cleansing the palace, the torches employed and, by extension, the baleful influences removed were carried off to the Luo River by the cavalry from the army camps near the capital."

²⁹⁶ Favret-Saada, "Unbewitching as Therapy," 45-46. "Each element of the farm will be enclosed in all possible ways. Thus for the car; medals of Saint Benedict must be placed in it and the hood sprinkled with holy water; it must be parked, with its doors locked in a padlocked garage; when the driver takes the wheel, he will have, pinned to his undershirt, a protective sachet and blessed salt in his pockets." See also Jeanne Favret-Saada, *Deadly Words*, trans. Catherine Cullen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980).

²⁹⁷ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 101. Recall the adorcism debate from Section I.

²⁹⁸ Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 141. "Gyasumdo Tibetans recall that in former Tibet, local landlords would sponsor grand exorcisms, in which a scapegoat in the form of a

Many healing rituals have an important “patial” dimension, for example those involved with magical aggression or sorcery - cursing enemies, defending oneself from curses, ‘sending back’ the curse so that it rebounds on the aggressor, and so forth. The rituals of cursing involve locating and removing dangerous objects and beings, as well as opening, closing, or blocking various paths to or from an enemy. Precisely how an aggressive *devta* is relocated or sent back depends on his or her characteristics. The Muslim spirit Sayyid has no shrines, and so he is simply taken into the forest. The *eri* and *acchari* are malevolent female sprites that reside in the forest and/or at high elevations, and their exorcism involves returning them to these locations in miniature bridal palanquins. Family ghosts are normally placed in a silver image, which is later immersed in the Ganges River or taken to Badrinath, though sometimes it may be buried in an inauspicious place as a kind of punishment. In none of those cases is a shrine erected. After all, the purpose is to remove the afflicting deity, not to encourage it to stay.³⁰⁰

There is a great variety in the final outcome and destination of the intruder, which up until now has not received much scholarly attention. Those entities successfully exorcised could then variously (a) undergo a conversion of sorts (which sometimes entails destruction),³⁰¹ (b) return to its original space (with the party line restored to its rightful place), (c) be sent to a new open location, or (d) be imprisoned in a container (often in solitude). In regards to the first potential destination, Mumford notes that when the Tibetan exorcisms characterize the demon as being killed, it is understood that he is “sent immediately into a higher rebirth.”³⁰² Similarly, in the early *dybbuk* cases of exorcism, the rabbi was not just disengaging the possessor (the spirit of a notorious sinner in his lifetime)

beggar would be exiled from the village. Carrying gifts of clothes, he would also carry away communal impurities and afflictions, as if to play the role of the demon being exorcised.”

²⁹⁹ Simmel, *Simmel on Culture*, 171.

³⁰⁰ Sax, *God of Justice*, 65.

³⁰¹ For the destruction of Tibetan zombies, see Turrell Wylie, “Ro-Langs,” *History of Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer, 1964). For video of the ritual destruction of a Tibetan effigy, see Arnaud Desjardins, *The Message of the Tibetans: Second Part, Tantrism*, DVD, Alize Diffusion, 2003.

³⁰² Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 148.

from its victim, but also interceding on the possessor's behalf and thus expediting its admission to Gehennom – petitioning God for the spirit's rehabilitation.³⁰³

As illustrative of the second potential destination, Gupta tells of a magician preparing an effigy of the fever demon, carrying it to the cremation ground (or the crossing of the four roads), and burying it near the afflicted patient. "O, fever," the magician mutters, "hear, whatever kind of fever demon you are whether one who comes daily or on alternate days or after three days or four days, or fifteen days, or a month, leave the patient and enter the earth³⁰⁴ along with the effigy." If this ritual is then performed for three days successfully, the fever is cured.³⁰⁵

For the third potential destination, we look to Mark 5: 9-13.

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

Finally, as Donald Harper has noted (1982), another device used in *Wu Shih Erh Ping Fang*, "Recipes for Fifty-two Ailments," is magical entrapment.

In one recipe for inguinal swelling the patient is surrounded by oak stakes which create an apotropaic screen to subdue the disease demon. [...] In an exorcistic procession reminiscent of the Great Expulsion, one recipe for child sprites uses a winnowing basket

³⁰³ J.H. Chajes, "Judgments Sweetened," *Journal of Early Modern History* 1, no. 2 (1997), 134, 156-157.

³⁰⁴ Peter Gold, *Navajo & Tibetan Sacred Wisdom* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1994), 269. In Anaji (the Enemy Way rite), the Navajo have a special ceramic water drum to "beat the ghost(s) of the enemy into the ground." Additionally, the 1977 case study of Obeyesekere features the possessors returning to social opponents. See Obeyesekere, "Psychocultural Exegesis," 288. "She faints within the magic circle: the demons flee, but the *Kapurāla* urges them to go attack those who brought them in...."

³⁰⁵ Gupta, *Magical Beliefs and Superstitions*, 163.

to snare the child sprites.³⁰⁶

This new container can be either fixed or mobile, but typically its inner space is closed from the external world. This is a sharp contrast to the intruder's initial location, as it originally existed in multitude³⁰⁷ and with the capacity for agency. In Sax's research, the ritual that establishes a *devta's* shrine is called *than ki puja*, "that is, the ritual (*puja*) to establish the *devta's* shrine, his 'place' (*than*), and it tells us much about local ideas concerning landscape and history."

Shrines are typically erected in order to mitigate a *devta's* affliction, or as a kind of thanksgiving for a blessing or favor. Virtually every house has a *than* for the lineage deity, although these are often done even when no one remembers the identity of an ancestral *devta*. They have forgotten, but the oracle helps them to remember. Every *than* has a guru, with exclusive rights to conduct worship there because he or his predecessor built it. [...] The shrines of peaceful *devtas* are usually inside the house, while shrines of the more dangerous *devtas* are outdoors. The ritual has a number of steps that are explicitly concerned with place: (1) driving away negative energies and purifying the place; (2) constructing the *than*; (3) summoning the *devta* by means of mantras and offerings; (4) installing the *devta* in the *than*; and (5) closing the paths to and from it, so that he cannot leave.³⁰⁸

Similarly, before being sealed with the magic word or device engraved on a seal, the rabbis of late 4 - 5th century Babylonia first relocated the demons within magic bowls. Once inside, the demons were "bound," "hobbled," and "silenced."³⁰⁹ The intruder's captivity then implies reduced movement and discontinuity for the opposing party.³¹⁰ "The

³⁰⁶ Harper, "Wu Shih Erh Ping Fang," 105.

³⁰⁷ Deleuze and Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 239-245. Recall the locative concern of group density.

³⁰⁸ Sax, *God of Justice*, 66.

³⁰⁹ Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, Vol. 5 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 218-222, 230. For a more modern tradition in Judaism, see Jason Haxton, *The Dibbuk Box* (Kirksville: Truman State UP, 2011).

³¹⁰ Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 123-124. "Every spring the Tibetan males in every household must participate in an arrow-shooting festival called Da Gyab (*mda' rgyab*). [...] A gun is fired and they begin the arrow-shooting competition which defeats the demonic forces for that year. [...] On two large board targets thirty meters apart the lama draws two

assumption in the case of ghost exorcism, both in the Khandoba cult and generally throughout the Deccan, is that the exorcised ghost's power must be localized," says John Stanley.

The purpose of the localization is normally control – to keep the ghost's power from possessing someone else. Iron nails are driven into trees,³¹¹ or some other ritual marker is created either at the point of the exorcism or at a point nearby where three roads intersect. Sometimes, however, the power of an exorcised ghost is such that it can be not only controlled, but appropriated for help and assistance³¹² – reformed, in a sense, into a demigod.³¹³

F. Conclusion

For exorcism, there is always a story being told spatially. Where are the participants in the ritual located? Who gets to speak (to whom) and when? What direction do they face? Are they forced to move or are they immobilized? How do they interact with the sacred? Are there spectators? Section IV has argued that *space* is the best heuristic available to analyze the phenomenon of exorcism. A spatial analysis highlights the ritual mechanics and the physical characteristics of the practice, recognizing features that are rarely mentioned in the social commentaries common to the academic literature. With this in mind, I have

figures of male and female demons, called *ling-ga*. [...] The lama's ritual chant coerces the demonic force into the *ling-ga* image that gives it a form, so that when the arrow strikes, it will be subdued."

³¹¹ Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self*, 94. This act of nailing the intruders to designated trees is common in India (among both Hindu and Muslim locals). "The *pēy* was said to 'enter' his victim through a hair lock. The exorcist repeatedly asked the demon, 'Give us *your* hair!' The lock was treated as the metonymic identity of the spirit.... And when the magician tied the lock into a knot, the demon protested with dramatic anguish, 'It hurts! it hurts!'" Nabokov notes that the lock of hair is then nailed to a nearby tree trunk. See also Jackie Assayag, "But, They Do Move...", in *Managing Distress*, 33, 44-45.

³¹² Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 149. In another Tibetan exorcism, an effigy, now containing the three-headed demon (*mGo gsum*), is eventually put at the crossroad where it faces outward, now a "weapon" (*Zor*) aimed at alien demonic forces.

³¹³ John Stanley, "The Capitulation of Mani," in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees*, 288.

argued that exorcism rituals seek to resolve spatial tensions between humans and various supernatural agents.

Every exorcism then involves the following three preconditions: (1) a space that features numerous occupants and users; (2) that some user/occupant wishes to regulate or manage the traffic, to designate or reinforce the proper activity within the space; and last, (3) if an exorcism takes place, it must be assumed that a spatial conflict first occurred. In short, the ritual is a spatial practice that implies the exclusivity and regulation of space. In particular, the second precondition (“the power play”) implies that a spatial or institutional localization of power is in place. An exorcism is deployed upon a given space (objects, bodies, locations) whenever someone’s use of said space (demonic assault, sorcery, and witchcraft, not just possession) has been deemed in some way *improper*. As a result, an occupant must be evicted, a user must be denied access, a connection must be severed, and/or a distance must be achieved. Thus, I have argued that exorcism refers to either the proper maintenance of rigidly fixed positions in space or to their establishment. To demonstrate this, I have offered a comparative analysis of cross-cultural cases of exorcism – organizing key examples into five spatial dimensions,³¹⁴ each of which engages a particular set of locative concerns.

³¹⁴ Not every exorcism case fulfills the five-part sequence completely or in the same fashion. For instance, it should be made explicit that a successful exorcism does not require a specified destination for the occupant of the exorcised space (the fifth dimension). Often what matters most is that the representatives of the opposing party have been displaced – and have been replaced in their position of dominance. Furthermore, various types of localizations overlap within the same physical space (the Matriushka doll). For example, the spaces of the exorcist (the physical space occupied and his/her place in the ritual space created) are typically enclosed within a larger social space or sealed within a private setting. In cases of self-exorcism (where exorcist and exorcised are one in the same), the temporary space of the intruder is commingled with the spaces of the exorcist and the exorcism ritual space (as illustrated by the tarantism phenomenon). See also FN 111, 22, and 23.

- (1) the initial dwelling of the intruder
- (2) the temporary space of the intruder
- (3) the space of the exorcism
- (4) the spaces of the exorcist
- (5) the final destination of what is exorcised

Exorcism implies a constant competition for space, against all sorts of supernatural predators and pests. The initial space of the intruder (the first dimension) is often a distant, nonempty place with penetrable boundaries and shifting territories. Unsuspecting victims are especially vulnerable for attack at times and places of transition and at points where the group density is low. As the intruder moves into a new temporary space (the second dimension), so does its “party line.”

Spaces are to be viewed as extensions of both their occupants and users. Thus, the advancing “foreign other” reconfigures the rigidly fixed positions previously in place; their presence threatens the perceived homogeneity of the space and can also lead to a “defacement of public property.” Exorcism then serves as the suppression or elimination of unsanctioned differentiation between the occupants and users of a given space. For this reason, it is common for religious practitioners to regularly leave special contraptions designed to either ward off or capture foreign invaders.

The temporary space of the intruder can be a fixed or mobile location. But despite numerous other examples, most of the scholarship on exorcism is devoted to the human body. The focal points of this space are often entrances, exits, catacomb-like compartments, and/or places of pain. Across cultures, the hair and the mouth seem to be most frequent means of access into the human body. Once inside the space, the intruder often displays fluid movement, utilizing the connectivity of space, which implies less room for the original inhabitant. The exorcism then intensifies due to the intruder’s newly found attachment or

connection to the space or due to the difficulty of locating its deep or secret hiding spot.

Additionally, sometimes a new occupant (one closely associated with the group) is formally invited to take the place of the intruder (an act of replacement), though the entry point is not always made explicit.

The exorcist's use of tools (objects, substances, images, sounds, utterances, etc.) implies not only an agent of change (the exorcist) responsible for the proper and effective use of the tool but also its orientation relative to the object of change (the space to be exorcised). This reveals that certain areas of the space have been in some way highlighted with significance, if they are to be oriented around. Often these focal points are places of pain or entry/exit points – the most common area of focus being the head, regardless of the specific ailment.

If mobile (like a body), the temporary space of the intruder can be transported to a more preferred location, often a sacred place already marked with the specific character of the group, already embedded with a history and identity that implies intimacy. The dynamic to be studied is then how the recipient of the exorcism functions within these larger spaces (the third dimension). My earlier analogy that these first three dimensions operate as a Matriushka doll (spaces nested within other spaces) reveals only part of this complex dynamic. The occupants and users of a space are capable of dominating and warping it however they see fit. Movement and activity within the space are then oriented around specific pivots (ones either self-designated or culturally enforced). Just as exorcism implies a localization of power (monopolization of place) whereby weaker groups are relegated to the periphery,³¹⁵ power can also be demonstrated through a restriction of improper movement and a restoration of proper behavior in space.

³¹⁵ FN 220.

Among the prescriptive (programmatic) rituals, the socio-religious power belongs to exorcist, the one who commands much of the “gameplay.” As the ritual takes place (emplacement), the exorcist then directs the attention of the participants involved and the audience observing, altering their relationships to the larger space. Direct contact with the exorcist’s enchanted tools and anatomical equipment demonstrates the importance of proximity as a means of ritual efficacy. During the ritual the exorcist also becomes a temporary user of the given space that is exorcised. This ritual subspace shared between the exorcist and the recipient – which also includes any objects, tools, and other sacred pivots – reflects the “field of play” mentioned throughout this thesis (the fourth dimension).

Displacement is then the ultimate goal of most exorcisms, though there is a great variety in the final outcome and destination of the intruder (the fifth dimension). Those entities successfully exorcised could then variously (a) undergo a conversion of sorts (which sometimes entails destruction), (b) return to its original space (with the party line restored to its rightful place), (c) be sent to a new open location, or (d) be imprisoned in a container (often in solitude). In the latter scenario, this new container can be either fixed or mobile, but typically its inner space is closed from the external world. This is a sharp contrast to the intruder’s initial location, as it originally existed in multitude and with the capacity for agency. The intruder’s captivity then implies reduced movement and discontinuity for the opposing party.

Consider this summation an unofficial “rulebook” for the “game” of exorcism (an extension of the field manual in Section I). To reiterate, exorcism’s “gameplay” is full of many competing and supporting “roles,” some of which are available to human participants while other “non-playable characters” are explicitly not human. Sections II and III were

devoted to examining the various relationships between the key “players” of the “game.”

But I have also argued that scholars should equally focus on the relationships of the “players” with the other “game mechanics” (props, tools, equipment, intervals of time, etc.) and with the general “field of play.”

These “game mechanics” and “field of play” then illustrate the web of dynamic relationships (between humans and non-humans) mentioned by Bruno Latour and others in Section III. A spatial analysis then provides a better understanding of exorcism’s “gameplay.” *Space* matters to the study of exorcism – and religion, more broadly. Various places serve as appropriate locations for cultural transmission or serve the “players” as empty positions to occupy during “gameplay” (in an epiphenomenal fashion). But within the “rules of play” (for which there are culturally regulated turn-taking strategies), space also serves as a coveted resource. Space is a social currency, a capital to be gained and used against humans and non-humans alike.

V. Conclusion

In light of the fragmented areas within the academic study of exorcism, this thesis was my effort to fill in the gaps of the literature, offering a comprehensive analysis of numerous cross-cultural cases studies – organizing the eleven most prominent properties of the phenomena into a concise field manual (Section I), synthesizing the most frequently cited scholars of the field into cohesive cultural and social commentaries (Sections II and III), and advancing the field into a new theoretical direction with the presentation of five spatial dimensions of exorcism (Section IV).

My goal has been to engage the ostensive characteristics of this phenomenon, whereby one could point to an event or ritual and confidently categorize it as “exorcism.” This thesis then operates on the premise that exorcism functions *visibly in space*. A spatial analysis was applied to highlight the ritual mechanics and the physical characteristics of exorcism’s “gameplay,” features that are rarely mentioned among the cultural and social commentaries common to the scholarship.

Space is the best heuristic available to study exorcism; it provides scholars with a more comprehensive understanding of exorcism’s “game mechanics” and the “field of play” – not just the social positions of the human “players.” Granted, these “players” are often central to the “gameplay” and Sections II and III reflect the use of engaging the social dynamics between the human participants. But Section IV, I argue, is more encompassing of the overall “game.”

In a constant competition for territory, spaces are always muddled with traffic. Thus, I have examined how the principals involved in exorcism mark and unmark space as their own; how the various social agents ritually interact with space; how spaces are created,

warped, and dominated; how movement and activity within space are regulated; how spaces influence religious individuals and vice versa. In the end, whether exorcism manifests as a spontaneous event or as a prescriptive ritual, there is always a *story* being told in space. This spatial analysis of exorcism then contributes to the study of how human beings religiously interact with space (with whatever is in their environment).

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